

T. H. Gale

AN AUSTRALIAN MILLIONAIRE.

AN
AUSTRALIAN MILLIONAIRE.

BY
MRS. A. BLITZ.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

WARD, LOCK, BOWDEN, AND CO.
LONDON: WARWICK HOUSE, SALISBURY SQUARE, E.C.
NEW YORK: EAST 12TH STREET.
MELBOURNE: ST. JAMES'S STREET. SYDNEY: YORK STREET.
1893.

[All rights reserved.]



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AFTER TWENTY YEARS - - -	I
II. ROLAND BREAKS HIS PROMISE - -	26
III. MRS. CALLIPORT IS CRUEL TO BE KIND -	51
IV. JESSIE CLUTCHES AT HEROISM - -	73
V. THE BREACH REPAIRED - - -	91
VI. LOCKSTUD PLAYS A LOSING CARD - -	115
VII. WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL - - -	139
VIII. LARRY SHOWS HIS TEETH AT THE MENTION OF LOCKSTUD - - - - -	163
IX. THE SAINT VICTORIOUS - - -	183
X. SCATTERING SEED ON BARREN GROUND -	205
XI. FAILING TO STEM THE CURRENT - -	231
XII. A BULWARK OF STRAW - - -	256
XIII. MRS. DRIPPER WITH A WHISPER FIRES THE BULWARK - - - - -	279
XIV. CECIL LOCKSTUD - - - - -	301
XV. FATHER AND SON - - - - -	326



AN AUSTRALIAN MILLIONAIRE

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER TWENTY YEARS.

It was a wide-spreading garden, brilliant with flowers, redolent with mingled fragrance, and clad in verdure. It was a solemn dedication to the dead, where the cypress thrived and swayed its dark-green, delicate branches, where the winds rustled through the trees, and, sighing softly, sang a requiem of their own over all that remained of perishable humanity—over its last worldly home, where Nature free and joyous burst through the consecrated earth to blossom there and beautify it, to soothe the heart and exalt the soul of those who trod it so reverently, or wept for what it covered.

Let the stone slabs or costly monuments—

'the splendour of woe, which the children of vanity rear'—the polished marbles and mottled granite fashioned by art, find voice for the imaginative and impressionable, and cry, 'Behold us, a band of grim fingerposts: we point to cold mortality; for here lie your dead, and here shall you in your turn also lie!' And the warm blood shall not creep, and the oppression that contact with death so often creates shall vanish beneath the benign influence of the smiling garden of roses and lilies—sweet prototype of immortality—whispering, 'Seeds but sown to rise again and bloom in a God's-acre unknown.'

'With thy rude ploughshare Death turns up the sod,
And spreads the furrow for the seed we sow;
This is the field and acre of our God,
This is the place where human harvests grow.'

This was Gobong, one of the cemeteries of Phillipia, and connected by rail with the city.

It lay basking under cloudless skies one sunny afternoon with scarcely a footfall to crunch its gravel paths, or awaken it from drowsy tranquillity until the arrival of the necropolis train.

But it was speeding onward now—could be seen from the distance like a mechanical toy,

with its column of smoke and line of rushing carriages. Presently space was lessened; the toy-like aspect was lost, the snort of the iron horse—‘the steam beast,’ as a writer aptly calls it—became louder and louder, the rumble strengthened, the ground trembled as motor and train darted and flashed on their way to finally slacken pace and glide into the Gobong station.

Out from the carriages there flocked men, women, and children, severally dispersing over the wide corner ‘city of the dead,’ to visit the graves of relatives and friends.

Three young people separated from the crowd and walked abreast—a youth and two pretty girls. The former was a tall, well-built, gentlemanly lad, more man than lad, and yet not quite either, with a hairless face—save for a faint sprouting of down on his upper lip—round, boyish, and smooth, with a slight irregularity of feature when animated, and honest, clear, dark eyes; with glossy nut-brown hair inclined to wave and ripple, and mouth which, regular enough in repose, in speech or smile shifted a corner with a sudden upward curve to the right cheek for the pleasant display of ivory-white and perfect teeth. His

forehead was massive and marble-like, with a prominence at the temples, and a Byronic upward shoot running into the hair on one side—a phrenological promontory, be it said, of ideality—which marked him at once to the observer as one capable of lofty sentiment and poetical conception.

His companions were girls, differing from each other, but each of a distinct order of beauty.

One was tall, supple-limbed, graceful, and self-possessed ; the other was short, almost of child-like stature, but perfectly symmetrical.

One was of the blonde, the other of the brunette type. One was commanding, with a countenance in which power and sweetness were so blended that the first was toned in its strength by the second, which shone and glorified ; the other was less assertive, more impulsive, true in affection, clinging, loving, forgiving, and governed by immediate impressions and surroundings.

Both were charming, and each carried a lovely bouquet. They walked on silently until they reached one tombstone in particular—a handsome structure with a delicately carved urn at its summit, and a chiselled wreath twined about the stately granite column, with grasses and flowers springing at its feet, and a cypress

at either side, the whole enclosed with iron palisading. It presented an inscription which began,

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
JEREMIAH GOLDWIN.

Here the three stood reverently, while the lad lifted his hat and his lips moved, but gave no sound. The girls, waiting till he re-covered his head, seated themselves on the grass at the railings, and he took his place between them and a little to the rear to hold a sunshade aloft to protect them from the sun, while they commenced with quick, dexterous fingers to unfasten their bouquets and draw from one of their pockets a coil of thin wire to form into a hoop of a few feet in circumference, intended to receive the flowers, and ultimately become an exquisite wreath. Neither of them showed tears or any emotion, excepting one of mingled piety and respect.

‘This is the sixth year we have come here so, isn’t it, Rol?’ asked the little brunette, busy at her flowers.

‘Just six years, Mid,’ replied Rol.

‘And how many more, I wonder?’ asked the blonde.

‘Don’t wonder,’ said Rol; ‘it draws un-

pleasant possibilities too near. I don't like to think that there may come a time when I shall pay this annual visit without your solace—that I shall come without either of you—without flowers, the only tribute I can offer to my father's memory as yet. I like to see you working them up as you both do. No other hands shall ever do the same for me, and mine are clumsy. Without you, I should yearn more than ever for the home affection which is never mine, and for the father whom I have never seen.'

'How is it we strive or pine for what can never be ours?' asked the blonde again.

'The fruitless striving, Una, compels us to recognise our utter dependence on a Higher Will.' This from Rol.

'Yes,' responded the blonde; 'knowing that, I still envy the girls who have sweet mothers.'

'And,' put in Mid, whose baptismal name was Jessie, but whom these two friends had long since christened Midget, 'I—having a father—wish I could love him, Rol, as you could love yours, were he here; but—— Who's that?' Jessie's eyes were directed to the rear of the stone, where a man suddenly appeared, and was almost crouching at the rails there, evidently to escape observation, but without

success, for two pairs of eyes now followed the bent of Jessie's as she halted on the point of a remark, and abruptly exclaimed, 'Who's that?'

'It is some poor fellow in trouble,' whispered the blonde.

'Let us move away from here and give him the privacy he seeks,' suggested Rol, also in an undertone.

The girls at once seconded the proposal, and gathering up the loose flowers, with the wire-hoop still awaiting decoration, and hanging over the young man's wrist, they with him walked to a chair set under a tree some distance from the grave, and, reseating themselves there, were soon at work again wreathing the damask roses, clematis, and honeysuckle with ferns and grasses and sprouting buds, picking them daintily from the sweet-smelling heap now piled in Rol's two hands, joined and basin-shaped, as he held them out and stood before his companions.

But the strange man had turned their thoughts into another channel, and interested them enough to make supposition concerning him busy, or imagination weave pathetic history.

When the wreath was completed and ready for its purpose, when it was necessary to make

no delay for fear of missing the return train to Phillipia, the stranger stood at the grave still, but with altered position.

He now faced the inscription bare-headed. His hat of soft felt lay on the grass, his lean body was bent forward, while his hands rested one over the other on a stout walking-stick, as if for support of an infirm frame.

His hair and beard were snow-white, the latter falling almost to his waist, and beginning from his cheek-bones. His attitude and bearing at that grave of all graves excited in the young man a pardonable curiosity, which he would not have so soon satisfied but for pressure of time. But compelled to intrude himself, he bade the girls remain under the tree while he went on his mission to place the wreath over the urn of his father's tombstone. He carried it carefully over his fingers, and arriving at the spot so sanctified, he, stationed at the side of the stone, the better to throw the sacred garland, with his head once more uncovered, his face upturned, bright with its play of intellect and chaste with its filial love, with the sunshine glinting on the ripples of his hair, lifted his arm, and with dexterous aim the white circle of blooming flowers fell like a necklace about the urn—a would-be crown.

‘Thunder!’ exclaimed the old man, who had not observed the advance of the young one, and only saw him when in the act of paying this tribute to the memory of one he still mourned. He lifted his body as straight as it could go, and made a few steps forward to confront the youth, to put a hand on each of his shoulders, and peer into the boyish smooth face.

‘What’s your name, youngster?’ he asked.

‘Roland Kovodel Goldwin,’ came the reply.

‘Say it again.’

‘Roland Kovodel Goldwin,’ repeated the youth with some amusement and one of his attractive smiles, to wave his lip upward and make his teeth gleam pleasantly.

The old man’s countenance became contorted; he lifted his hands, and dropped them at his sides, walked off a few paces, and returned to renew his stare, and arouse more interest in Roland and the girls—who were distant spectators—than ever.

‘Are you in trouble? Can I do anything for you?’ asked Roland.

‘It runs in the blood,’ said the stranger mysteriously. ‘That seems the very thing your father’s son would say to me—“Can I do anything for you?” It was always, as far as I know, “Can I do anything for you?” with

him. I wouldn't know you, youngster, for his boy : you ain't like him ; but I'd know you for his boy because of them words : "Can I do anything for you?" If you're not ashamed of a rough old chap like me, shake hands—shake hands.'

The old man put out a lean, shrivelled hand, palm uppermost, and Roland's long white taper-fingered one met it heartily.

'You knew my dear father, then?' he said.

'Knew him!' Here followed a queer gurgle of a laugh, expressing amusement at such a question. 'Did you ever hear tell of them two coves they call, I think, Damson and Peaches? They come in a play somewhere, don't they?'

'Do you mean Damon and Pythias?'

'Eh, is that what you call 'em? Well, it is a long time ago since I came across 'em, and I've got a dolt of a head for names ; but you know 'em, and know what I mean. Your father and me was just them two chaps, and not a bit less.'

'And what is the name of my father's close friend?' inquired Roland, with his hand firmly clasped still.

'There has been no call to speak to you of Washington Larry, eh?' was the interrogative reply.

‘Washington Larry!’ exclaimed the young man. ‘No call to speak of the man who saved his life! Why, I know you well, and thought never to see you, and show you that I am grateful, too!’

The tears sprang to Larry’s eyes, and, while his hand, firmly grasping at Roland’s, began to work up and down as if at a pump-handle, he said with some huskiness of speech :

‘Lord! to think I should live to see this day, after all, to see the little baby growed to a man—the little chap that poor old Jerry nigh hugged to death, and cried tears of blood over!’

‘You have been a long time over in Flindersland,’ said Roland, anxious to divert thoughts which were evidently painful. ‘Captain Penacove will be as delighted to see you as I am.’

‘Ay! I’ve a great liking for the Captain; but it’s not to see him I’m here. I had a hankering to see Jerry’s grave and Jerry’s boy, and I’ve just run down for a few months and a spell to see you come into your own, and then run off again. And now to think we should meet here, on the very spot!’

‘It is the anniversary of his death,’ reminded Roland.

‘Don’t I know it? I reckoned for it to be when I left. Did your mother speak of me?’

He let go the young man’s hand now, and rested on his stick, as he put this question, rather dubiously.

‘She may have done so, but it is from Captain Pennacove I have heard of you, and through him that I seem to know you thoroughly.’

This was a pious equivocation on Roland’s part, for he had no recollection of the name of Washington Larry ever passing his mother’s lips, so he added quickly :

‘Come and be introduced to his niece and another young lady ; they are waiting for me to join them, and we shall have to hurry to catch the train. Come.’

‘Girls!’ said Larry, with a grimace at the word, as if it had produced a bad taste in his mouth. He had an aversion to women in general, and avoided them, and he was thinking of the yellow-haired witch he had reason to remember. ‘Girls!’

- ‘Come,’ repeated Roland, as he made a step forward, and, stooping, lifted the felt hat from the grass, and placed it on Larry’s head, to be rewarded with a grateful look and a ‘Thank you,’ as well as immediate concession to his wish.

‘Mother alive?’ queried the old man, as he walked towards the young ladies reluctantly, but unable to refuse Jerry’s boy anything.

‘Yes.’

‘Still got yaller hair?’

‘Oh yes! She looks girlish even now sometimes.’

‘Hum!’ mumbled Larry; ‘it ought to have turned like mine, I should think.’

Roland heard the muttering, but not the words. In his haste he took rapid strides, with which the old man kept pace at his side, and, reaching the ladies, he cried:

‘Una, Mid! this is my father’s dearest, best, most loyal friend, Mr. Larry. Mr. Larry, this’—pointing to the blonde—‘is Miss Una Pennacove, and this’—pointing to the brunette—‘is Miss Jessie Lockstud.’

Una and Jessie bowed, and Larry did the same rather awkwardly, and was about to say something polite or flattering to the Captain’s niece, when the name of Lockstud momentarily chased all power of speech from his tongue, and made him positively frown at the guileless little creature who happened to own it.

‘There goes the whistle!’ Roland called out excitedly. ‘We shall miss the train if we don’t hurry.’

The necessary call for speed prevented further parley or comment, and the four hastened to the station, to find they had time to stand on the platform in waiting for a few minutes.

Larry drew Roland on one side, and asked :

‘ Who is that ?’

Roland, following the direction of Larry’s nod, replied :

‘ Miss Lockstud.’

‘ I’ve got a sieve of a memory for names, but that one don’t slip through—it’s got too much hanging on to it ; I ain’t likely to forget it. Got any relations ?’

‘ Plenty,’ laughed Roland. ‘ Parents, sisters, and brothers.’

‘ What’s her father ?’

‘ Manager of the Civic Bank.’

‘ Called what ?’

‘ Theodore Lockstud.’

‘ Ah !’ The monosyllable was a groan.
‘ Let’s talk of something else.’

‘ Ogre !’ cried Jessie to Una, resenting Larry’s manner, as they stood apart.

‘ Eccentric, dear,’ corrected Una. ‘ Uncle tells me that Mr. Goldwin’s death nearly drove him mad. They were so dear to each other. A man capable of such love, Mid, cannot be an ogre.’

‘I’m on for the smoking carriage, youngster,’ said Larry, with a hand affectionately pressing Roland’s arm, ‘but we’ll meet again. I’m put up at the Virginia Arms; come and see me.’

‘I’ll come to-night,’ responded Roland impulsively. ‘I want you to tell me all about my father.’

‘You’re a brick!’ exclaimed Larry with earnestness, as he hurried away to his desired smoke, without any further recognition of the young ladies or saying good-bye.

‘He is not a model of politeness, your friend,’ remarked Una Pennacove, when she, with Roland and Jessie opposite, was seated in the carriage and was steaming back to Phillipia.

‘An ogre,’ reasserted Jessie, disinclined to give up the word. ‘He glared at me as if he would send fire out of his eyes to burn me upon the spot, and I had actually been pitying him.’

Roland looked vexed, and declared aggressiveness.

‘You are speaking of the man who saved my father’s life, who was his bosom friend,’ he said, turning to Jessie.

Jessie made no reply; she coloured, and her

throat swelled with the pain of restrained tears. She could not bear Roland's displeasure, and in consciousness of having offended him she could not speak, while he thought she was sulky; but he did not understand her. And next Una spoke.

'Mid does not mean what she says. We saw tears in his eyes when he parted with you, or rather we saw him wipe them away with his hand, and she is still sorry for him, thinking he has some trouble.'

'You are right, Una. The poor old fellow was too much moved to remember conventionality. He is still mourning my father's death, and if he is rough and unpolished and uncultured, what matter? He is honest and faithful now, as he was when he stood by his friend and got a broken arm for his sake. Phillipia was hateful to him after that friend's death, and so he rushed from it to take your uncle's place on the station, and now after twenty years he has returned to visit the grave on the anniversary of my dear father's death, as we have done to-day, and to remain in Phillipia till I come of age. I think we ought to make him a guest of Goolgun.'

'And if not of Goolgun he shall come to Unaville,' said Una, who had her doubts as to

the welcome such a man as Mr. Larry would receive from Mrs. Goldwin. 'You know our house, which is called Unaville in my honour, was once "Bachelor's Nest," and his home and your father's a long time ago, before we were born.'

Roland understood the gist of her promise; he knew why she had said, 'If not of Goolgun he shall come to Unaville,' and he thanked her; while Jessie, clasping her little gloved hands in her lap, had turned her face to the window and still maintained silence: she also knew why Una had so spoken. A proposition to give bed and board to Jeremiah Goldwin's friend beneath his widow's roof was not one likely to find favour with that widow for many reasons unknown to her son. He was thoroughly ignorant of all that had gone before, but not of her disposition to domineer and control.

He was not so careless of her rule as might be expected from an only child, who is sometimes converted into an insufferable nuisance through over-indulgence and the weak government of misguided love.

Roland Goldwin had never been spoiled by silly clemency or superabundance of affection or adulation. His natural sweetness of disposition and loving characteristics had craved for a

reciprocal rush of tenderness from the beautiful woman he called 'mother.'

Mrs. Dripper—who was a fixture at Goolgun still, and had been from the time she began to administer to his wants—was softer, kinder, more gentle in every way towards him.

She had taught him his alphabet and nursery rhymes, and told him blood-curdling tales of ghost or goblin, and milder ones of fairy, mermaid, or giant; while his mother, indifferent to the pleasure of unfolding the infantile mind, had strict regard for his healthy physical development. She commenced to superintend his diet as soon as he could suck a crust or enjoy broth. She never allowed him out of her sight, in dread of those comestibles so dear to the juvenile palate being offered to him. She studied medical books on infancy and childhood, and adopted all their rules. If an epidemic broke out in suburb or city, she was off to some distant colony with him and Mrs. Dripper.

Of course a few who knew her well smiled meaningly, and said it was only natural after all, considering how much depended upon his life; for the peculiarities of her husband's will were not unknown to them.

This close, anxious watching continued from his infancy to boyhood and up to the present

time, and made the victim wish his mother less solicitous about his health and more for his general happiness; for he did not know until recent years what possibilities she feared, and why, while she encouraged him in athletic sports and gymnastic exercises, she forbade him so indulging in the summer months to insure against wet flannels and consequent chills, which he would have braved with the incautiousness of robust youth, which knows not what it is to suffer, and laughs at risks.

Neither could he know why she was cold and austere. She was a puzzle to him, and with her oppressive rigid rule it occurred to him that he was worse off than the Czar, with his mother's ever-watchful eyes as zealous as the body-guard on the alert to detect lurking bullet, blade, or dynamite.

He had never entered a school for fear of 'pestilence stalking in darkness' within its walls. His education had been conducted by tutors, and for companionship he had to thank the children of Theodore Lockstud, at whose house Mrs. Goldwin's wishes in regard to his food were respected. He grew and thrived amidst Priscilla's boys and girls as one of her own, and he was fond of all in the house excepting its master, of whom he, like his little

companions, was somewhat afraid. They never laughed aloud, or played, or shouted, when he was by.

There are certain people the influence of whose nature acts like an unwholesome cell, where God's free air cannot enter, and where, as dictated by natural laws, a light must expire. The light died out of the children when the father's presence clouded the atmosphere they breathed. Roland felt something of the heavy air too, but loved to be of his household, nevertheless. Fortunately for him he could revel in a sunshine, more often than not, which was denied to him at Goolgun. When Una Pennacove, a tall angular girl of eleven years, became an orphan and shared her uncle's home as his adopted daughter, he found in her an affinity of soul still more precious to brighten his boyhood.

Priscilla Lockstud loved him from his baby-toddling days. Was he not the foster-brother of her first-born? She laughed at his jokes, and cried over his disappointments, and eulogized each kindly sentiment and chivalrous action emanating from him. To her and the Pennacoves he perhaps owed at the present day much that was excellent in his character.

He was now a student of the Phillipia

University, and aspiring to his degree of B.A. So was his friend Una, and very often they conned from the one book ; but he was addicted to over-application in his anxiety for success, and in this matter again the maternal guardianship sometimes arose to irritate him.

If in the afternoon he worked too long, he was told to close his book and go for a walk. If in the night absorbed in some particular study beneath the midnight gas, to his discomfiture his mother's voice came through the keyhole of the door like a curfew-bell, ' Turn off the gas,' and darkness would fall upon him.

In one way she never interfered, and therein lay a very happy side to his existence. He had a handsome allowance to do with as he pleased, without stint, comment, or question ; for was there not a glorious milch cow, as it seemed, at John Tackerline's office, from which he could draw a copious draught now and again, destined to quench the desires of others as well as his own ?

It was an advantage of which he was duly conscious, and for which he was sincerely grateful, because a flow of generosity always his never knew a check to its practical exercise.

Perhaps there is more to be said of the text, ' It is more blessed to give than to receive,'

than has been written. It is mostly accepted in a celestial sense ; the action of giving is to be set down to our credit in the great Book, and create expectancy only of future reward in the dim hereafter. Is there not an immediate compensation ? Active benevolence keeps itself warm, every gift kindles a glow at its heart. It pours forth from its horn of plenty, and exults and trembles with a sweet self-gratulation. It is a higher law of selfishness perhaps—a fruit-laden tree on earth, yet of seed divine, and with fragrance reaching heaven :

‘Grasp the whole world of reason, Life and Sense,
In one close system of Benevolence :
Happier as kinder, in whate’er degree,
And height of Bliss, but height of Charity.’

Roland, who knew he was heir to immense wealth, and was already planning what he should do with it to make some portion of the world happier when he should be its custodian, felt himself approaching the ‘height of Bliss.’ He looked forward eagerly to being his own master, to escaping for a time from Goolgun and the restrictions enforced by one to whom obedience was due. He wished to give her affection, but was repulsed. They never seemed to understand each other.

Mrs. Goldwin had asserted in her early widowhood her determination to dedicate her future to her son. She did not swerve from her intention, apparently, for she continued to live a retired, quiet life, almost equal to that of Mrs. Calliport—never entertaining on the previous elaborate scale. ‘When her son came of age,’ she said aloud, as if to defend this line of action, ‘it would be another thing, of course; she would have done her duty, and he could keep a Liberty Hall, and be as hospitable as he chose.’ With her it was very different, she told herself. Certain investments could not have been made out of clippings from her annuity had she been improvident. As it was, those investments had been conducted by the manager of the Civic Bank, Mr. Theodore Lockstud.

That gentleman was now propriety personified. His wife, since Jeremiah Goldwin’s death, had found no reason to complain of his over-due attention to Mrs. Goldwin. He suddenly became conscious of moral obligations, and paid no allegiance to anybody but his aunt, Mrs. Calliport, still living, but of ripe age enough to give him confident expectation of soon obtaining that substantial acknowledgment which his unimpeachable conduct certainly merited from her. He had gone back to the

bank (out of which Mrs. Goldwin had once lifted him), at his aunt's wish, and had gradually risen to his present position. He knew now that she had a heavy fixed deposit at the Civic, that she had various properties besides in England, with accumulated rents well invested there.

All this promised to be a salve for his sorrow at her death-bed, when it should come, and so with her golden bit in his jaws, and silver reins about his neck, he was driven in a straight course, and if the bit hurt his mouth he bore it unflinchingly.

It was scarcely likely that under these altered habits the old whisperings of busy scandal would be remembered, excepting by those who could not forget. Exemplary behaviour on both sides had effaced the stain.

Theodore Lockstud did not want for friends; he had a fine house at the present time, with wide-open doors for hospitable purposes. Morose and stern as a rule in the bosom of his family, but cordial and free-handed with strangers or intimates with whom it suited him to appear at his best, he was just as sociable as Mrs. Goldwin was the reverse.

Roland objected to her seclusion and exclusion, but had no authoritative voice in the

matter, and if he now contemplated asking her to make Washington Larry her guest, he believed the fact of his friendship for her husband would compel her to make an exception in his case, and that she would not only accede to the request as a duty, but as a pleasure.

But when he thanked Una for saying his father's friend should be welcomed to Unaville if not to Goolgun, he knew she was prepared for his mother's opposition, yet he was not.

'How,' he argued mentally, 'could she be otherwise than gracious to one whom he considered they both should honour?'

He led the way to the subject that same night over the dinner-table.

CHAPTER II.

ROLAND BREAKS HIS PROMISE.

MRS. GOLDWIN and her son sat down to partake of their dinner, which was as strictly ceremonious and gloomy as that particular meal generally was at Goolgun. The large dining-room with its heavy oak furniture and sombre-curtained windows ; the long dining-table with its service set for two only, requiring but one-fourth of its length ; and the lad in buttons flitting about it and passing them dishes within easy reach of their own hands, made dining cumbersome for Roland always, but this night more so than ever, as he waited impatiently for dessert, knowing that attendance would be no longer necessary for that course, and he would be able to speak without reserve of Washington Larry, in the confident hope that his mother would surely coincide with his views on this subject if not on any other, and consent to receive Larry as a guest.

Mrs. Goldwin's additional years had not passed over her head without a rough sweep at her beauty. Hair and complexion retained their loveliness ; form and gait were still graceful and girlish, as her son had affirmed to Larry ; but there were curious little lines which were incipient wrinkles under the eyes, and deep indents from nostril to lip-corners, and about the contour of the chin, which had not been so decidedly asserted until latter years ; and the lips were paler and drawn, while the eyes, less lustrous, wore an everlasting expression of anxiety. In truth, it was a sour, unhappy countenance, and the beautiful Isabella Goldwin was spoken of as something that had been, but was not. Quite unwittingly she led the way, as soon as they were alone, to the proposition which was tingling on Roland's tongue.

'You went out early this afternoon,' she began, while in the act of paring a peach.

'Yes—to Gobong,' he replied. 'If you call to mind the date, you will know why.'

She did call to mind the date, but only in that moment. Not wishing to confess as much, she said :

'I am aware of the date, even if I do not choose to commemorate it in the way you do, and take a pleasant railway drive to a suburb

with two chattering girls ; for, of course, you went in the train as usual with Una and Jessie, and enjoyed the little trip, I dare say.'

'You would not have accompanied me if I had asked you, for you always have refused, though you should be my companion there. I thought it useless to ask you to-day,' Roland answered, not pleased with her reference to the 'chattering girls.'

'You are quite right, so it would have been. You and I look at these matters under different lights ; but you are allowed to please yourself, and that should content you. For my part, I can't understand what good such visits can do to the dead or to the living. The dead are dead. What do they know of the people who stare at or cry over their tombstones, do you think ? But the living are alive to the horrors the sight of such a crowd of stones must inflict. You may like it if only to pose for sympathy, and upon my word'—here one of her thin derisive laughs irritated Roland's ears—'you are a pretty subject for pity when one comes to reflect—you, the heir of a millionaire, and so painfully overburdened with expectations !'

Roland toyed with some loose grapes on his plate, and evinced no desire to laugh with her.

'You misunderstand : the heir does not call

for pity, the fatherless lad does. I crave to know the father of whom all who knew him speak so highly to this day. Surely he must have deserved the praise and esteem he won. You can't understand how sweet a pleasure it would be for me to have him with us, that I might make his honourable age as perfectly happy as is possible in this world. Money can't buy him back to life. Money can't reconstruct a nature, else I would forfeit much of my coming wealth to alter yours and attune it to mine. I pray daily, as I pray yearly at his grave, that I may be able to emulate his virtues ; and I appeal for guidance in my future stewardship of that wealth which his ability and hard industry have gathered, which will be a burden without that aid. I want to do as he did—make people happy.' Mrs. Goldwin bit at her peach, and said nothing. Her eyes glittered according to their wont when some suppressed emotion made her heart beat a little faster ; but she did not soften to this only child, who cried out with such filial passion for the father he had never known. She looked at him covertly as he, with fingers nervously rolling his grapes to and fro, continued : ' I want to make people happier and to know how best to do it. Only to-day I met one who knew father well, and

said he was always trying to make him happy. Perhaps you know him, for he did father a service never to be forgotten.'

'Indeed!' she said. 'I really can't say. My husband had numerous friends—of a kind—scattered about the colonies whose names I have no particular wish to remember.'

'But this one, mother, saved his life.'

Mrs. Goldwin dropped her pearl-handled knife and fork with a clatter on the plate. Roland thought it an accident, especially as she spoke quite coolly :

'Yes? Did he tell you his name?'

'I asked it when I found he was such an old friend of my dear father. Washington Larry he proved to be.'

Mrs. Goldwin evinced no surprise at the name she had expected to hear, but she said, with a harsh tremble beyond her restraint :

'I thought he was dead and done with.'

Roland looked up from his plate and at her. There was such vindictive hate concentrated in her face and her eyes that it boded ill for the request he was working up to.

'You know him, then?' he said.

'I loathe him!' she cried, now glaring at her son. 'And I forbid you to speak of him.'

If she had thrown her half-consumed peach

at his head Roland could not have been more surprised or more repelled than he was. He rose excitedly from his chair.

‘Why? I have promised to meet him this night, and I thought, being who he is and what he was to my father, we owed him much—hospitality, kindness, consideration, leniency. I thought that perhaps—I thought of—that is——’ He floundered painfully, and she put an end at once to his appeal on Larry’s behalf.

She also stood up, and her words rang shrilly as she leaned forward with both hands pressed on the table.

‘If you dare to ask him near these doors,’ she all but screamed, ‘you are a hypocrite with your prating about the dead coming to life that you might do honour! What shall be said of the living to whom you owe more than duty—more than gratitude—more than you will ever know? That man—gorilla, not man—is indebted to me for nothing but hate! He insulted me; he would have ruined me. If you don’t know where your duty lies after hearing this much, then I say you are a hypocrite!’

‘Insulted you—would have ruined you!’ Roland repeated, flushed and confused, not knowing how to construe her words.

‘Yes! Shall I say it again?’ she asked

scornfully. 'Never mind the why and wherefore ; some day, when you know more of the world, I may tell you, but not now. Only heed what I tell you this day. Yes, it is true he saved Jeremiah Goldwin's life—by a fluke, no doubt—and made capital out of it. It assured him the position of an independent man for his life ; *that* debt has been wiped off long ago. He had reason to love one who treated him so much better than he deserved, but he hated that one's wife ; he was jealous because I took his mate from him. He was a sneaking, crawling, prying idiot, and his insult has never been repaid. Now perhaps you will tell me where lies your duty—to the dead man or to the living woman who has done so much for you ?'

She gave out all this with a wild vehemence which he had never witnessed in her before.

'Sit down and calm yourself,' he entreated, with firm but low accents, unexcited to loudness. 'There is really no occasion for this undue rage. I hope I shall always know my duty to you without compulsion from you.'

His gentleness presented such a contrast to her violence that it stirred a sense of shame within her for her exhibition of passion, and made her obey him with a strange docility when she said by way of explanation, 'His

very name maddens me,' and next caught at her handkerchief convulsively, to bury her face in it and actually sob aloud.

The whole scene was painfully novel to Roland. That his mother was hot-tempered, and could say cruel, biting things when her temper was raised, he knew; but that she could be capable of such a volcanic eruption of wrath as just displayed, and which in its way fell like lava on his head, was quite a new phase of her disposition.

She was not a woman addicted to weeping over trivial matters, and, moreover, a woman's tears will upset the equanimity of any man who can boast an ounce of chivalry in his composition. Roland was rather liberally endowed with this quality, and, considering the circumstances, he had reason to be thoroughly distressed.

It was not likely that he could listen to her and remain unmoved, or feel now so strongly prejudiced in Washington's favour. It was not likely that he could give him his hand in pure friendship. His heart had gone out to the old man, white-haired and bent, whose hand had gripped his almost to pain, whose whole attitude towards him was a benediction; and there followed a revulsion of feeling. It was

as if he had drunk unwittingly from a poisoned brook with waters sweet and refreshing to his palate, but now infecting his blood and making him writhe in torture. What was he to do?

It was not the age for him to rush to the offender and throw down the gauntlet at his feet, to be followed by the clashing of swords, even if Larry's hoary head did not protect him. But it was his sacred duty to champion any insulted woman, and this woman was his mother, to whom he was not passionately attached, but who held a powerful claim on his obedience, nevertheless, because his filial instincts were strong.

'Certainly,' he said to himself; 'the greater absorbs the lesser duty. I must defend her by breaking my promise to Mr. Larry, and by avoiding the intimacy we mutually desired.'

He, still standing, moved nearer to her, and placed his hand gently on the coil of golden hair as she hid her face in her handkerchief, and said:

'Mother, enough of this; dry your eyes. I shall treat Mr. Larry as his past conduct to you deserves.'

And then he walked out of the room to his study, and wrote a note, which was soon despatched to the Virginia Arms, and over

which Larry still pondered, when the writer, having regained composure, had settled to his studies.

Leaving Roland to his books, we must turn to Unaville, once Bachelor's Nest, and now tenanted by Captain Pennacove, who had changed its name on the adoption of his niece.

It was a warm night, and the windows of its drawing-room were open. They overlooked the front veranda, which receded some distance from the street, behind a neatly-kept flower-garden, diamond-bedded, and with gravelled paths. The drawing-room was the same apartment as that in which Larry had made his unhappy communication to Jeremiah Goldwin. The same, yet not the same, for its old individuality had departed. Now it was rich and soft with admirably blended colour. It was adorned with pictures, sculpture, costly ornaments and knick-knacks, valuable and quaint odds and ends of grotesque art. It was draped with curtains and garnished with flowers, and completed with a grand piano. The *tout ensemble* declared the presiding genius of a refined and cultured woman.

It was occupied by two men, who were sitting opposite to each other at a chess-table, playing chess. One was Captain Pennacove; the other

was a young man of about twenty-five years, who was fond of visiting Unaville, ostensibly for a game of chess with the Captain, or to sing his songs to Miss Pennacove's accompaniments, and receive her instructions thereon, but in reality for far more cogent reasons, which shall be gathered later on.

He was at present a mere clerk in a large shipping firm, but expecting a rise in the near future. He was slim and of the average height, not brilliant in intellect, but shrewd, pleasant in converse, gentle in manner, sanguine in spirit, and not rich in good looks, but with *nez retroussé* and bright gray eyes, inclined to that expression which is so often classed as 'wicked'—wickedness accepted as palatable—giving a piquancy to what would have been otherwise a decidedly plain face. He could sing a good song, and, as Miss Pennacove was a thorough musician, and a charming singer, too, she enjoyed his visits, and founded a pleasant intimacy.

He had come this night for music, but, finding Miss Pennacove to be absent, he allowed himself to be grabbed by the Captain for a game at which the latter was an adept, and mostly won. The Captain took a delight in letting his opponent think he was well on for victory, and then pouncing on him at the last

with a powerful unexpected battalion, crying, 'Checkmate!'

He was inwardly gloating now because his young would-be adversary had just made a move to his own destruction, but, confident of success, was yet awaiting the next step in the campaign by the wily general of the mimic battle with breathless impatience.

And as the Captain's right hand hovered over the board, and his white brows almost bristled with effort of thought, a man, who looked very much older than he was, opened the wicket leading to the front-garden, trod the path to the veranda-steps, mounted them, and walked to one of the open windows, there to stand and watch alternately the players, and next to inspect the room with an air of disappointment.

'Thunder!' he exclaimed, 'it ain't the same, or I am dreaming!'

'Check!' cried the Captain.

'Ah!' from the man without, 'he ain't changed—looks younger with his seventy-five years, and not a day less. Not twenty years older.'

Now, the young player, whose name was Charles Mountfu, looked annoyed, and made a vain attempt to parry the Captain's attack,

which was quickly followed by a jubilant cry from the latter of 'Checkmate !'

'Beaten again, by Jove!' cried the vanquished one good-naturedly. 'Captain, you're merciless.'

'Come, I'll give you another trial,' offered the winner exultantly.

'No, thank you, I'm not on. One beating a night is enough. If you don't mind, I'll strum.'

'Strum away, then ; Una can't be long now ; she said she would be home early.'

Mountfu rose, and went towards the piano ; but in rising he spied the man at the window, and turned to the Captain with a low-toned remark :

'I say, there's a tramp on the veranda, Captain.'

'A tramp, is it ?' said the Captain, as he swept the chessmen into the drawer of the table. 'I'll have a few words with him, then.'

With the intention of making inquiry into the fellow's wants, and dismissing him from the premises, he strode hurriedly to the door between hall and veranda, just in time to open it and admit the supposed tramp, who had his hand on the knocker ready for a rap, but dropped it quickly to his side with the sudden meeting of the unexpected door-attendant.

The hall-lamp, burning high, threw its rays

on the visitor, who was not recognised by the Captain, whose greeting was not unkind, but yet was not such as anticipated.

‘Hollo, my man! you’ve made a mistake. Go round to the back if you want a meal, and then clear out.’

He did not know the snowy-bearded man who, with bent back, rested a hand on his stick, wore loose, badly-fitting clothes, a slouched felt hat low on his forehead, and who looked as if he wanted a meal, though he had not long dined.

‘Have I growed so han’some that you don’t know me?’ he said, looking hard at the man who had taken him for a beggar, and feeling a trifle hurt. ‘I’d have spotted *you* in a crowd—for, as sure as your name is Timothy Pennacove, mine is Washington Larry.’

‘Lord bless my girl!’ ejaculated the Captain with a start, and then a closer inspection; ‘so it is. I know your voice, but, hang me! I’d have passed you in the street.’

Their hands met in a fierce clasp, and the now beaming host drew his guest into the drawing-room, where Mountfu at the piano was playing a dreamy waltz very pianissimo, and unconsciously gave an entrance to the two old men with slow music.

Larry, having passed the threshold, stood

within the room leaning on his stick, and cast disparaging glances about him.

‘It ain’t the same,’ he said; ‘it ain’t got the old hang somehow.’

Where was the mantelpiece adorned with pipes, pouches, and cigar-ends? Where were Jerry and Cicero? The whisky-decanter, the steaming jug, the glasses, spoons, and sugar-bowl, the tobacco fumes, oh, where were they? But for the unchanged Captain he would have been as dazed as Rip van Winkle after his long sleep. The harmony of the waltz filled his ears, but not his senses; it might have been a cricket chirping on the hearth for all he heeded it.

He shook his head sadly, and, as if in a trance, allowed the Captain to lead him to a chair and lift the hat from his head—a ceremony which he had quite ignored in his bewilderment.

‘When did you come down?’

Here the Captain’s hearty voice made Mountfu aware that he was no longer alone. He turned on the music-stool, and understood the supposed vagabond to be a guest. Shrugging his shoulders with some amusement at his mistake, he ceased playing, but began to overhaul a heap of music idly tossed on the piano, holding himself aloof that he might not intrude

upon the Captain and the new arrival. Captain Pennacove, taking his seat close by Washington, put his question, 'When did you come down?'

'This morning,' answered Larry, waking up to his surroundings. 'I wanted to surprise you—and didn't I?'

'You did. I thought you would live and die in North Flindersland.'

'Knutsford,' curtly corrected Washington.

'I mean Knutsford, only one gets so used to the old names, you see. Goldwin and Company ought not to forget, though, since Knutsford is more prosperous than old North Flindersland tied on to the South. Have you come back for good—got tired of the station?'

'No, no. I felt a longing to see the old place, and other places and old faces; but, don't you fear, I'm not going to turn you out of this. I couldn't live here again by myself. I like the rough life best up at Washington. But I'm going to have a spell for some months till I get tired of doin' nothing.'

'And I,' said Captain Pennacove—'I am bound now to live quite a different way to the old time. I'm civilized now. I stop in Phillipia—not against my will, mind, but because I like

to for somebody else's sake—not alone on account of the business.'

'Not married?' exclaimed Larry, with something like a gasp.

'Married! Once a widower always a widower with me. No; but I'm fathered—bettered—whatever you like—with Ben's girl to look after me. I thought I was going to look after her, but she looks after me instead. You remember poor Ben—he was a barrister, you know.'

'Yes; where is he?'

'In a better place than this, I hope, where he died for want of briefs, poor chap! and left destitute his only child. I made her mine, and she's never done repaying me.'

'Ay, I've seen her,' said Larry, who, until the Captain had alluded to his niece, had forgotten the existence of the beautiful girl to whom Roland had introduced him only that afternoon.

'The devil you have! and where?' blurted out Captain Pennacove at this piece of information.

'At Gobong; I was there to see Jerry's grave.'

'And how did you know her?'

'Jerry's boy—I see Jerry's boy.'

Larry's eyes brightened as he said ' Jerry's boy ' with an affectionate intonation, and he was unconscious of his vague reply, only thinking of him.

' You saw Jerry's boy—Roland ?'

' Yes ; God bless him ! he's his father's own son.'

' How did you meet, then ?' cried the Captain, impatient for lucidity.

' At Jerry's grave, of course ; he was throwing flowers there on his stone, and I guessed it was him and spoke to him. He showed me her and the other one.'

' Well, you've seen the best girl in the world. I've been talking to you for ten minutes and more, and have never used an oath ; that's through her. I'm not half such a rollicking chap as I was. I used to swear like a trooper, but not since she came ; it wouldn't do, you know. When I feel a string of oaths coming up I ram them back again, and just let off easily a mild " Lord bless my girl ! " That never frightens her, and it comes quite natural now. And she is as clever as she is good. Why, man, she's in her second year at the University, and she's going to be a bachelor of arts. What do you think of that ? Think what our mothers would say if they could rise

and see our girls aspiring to be bachelors, and wearing a University cap and gown !

Larry looked just as much surprised as any long departed grandmother might could she return to the world this day to find an advance which to her would be but a deplorable retrogression of maidenly modesty.

‘A what ?’ he cried with some emphasis, not being fully acquainted with the gradual and worthy ascent of the female mind into the realms of learning and letters.

‘A bachelor of arts !’ Captain Pennacove made a proud stress on the title. ‘It is the aim now of a good few of our girls, and they make quite as fair shots as the lads. Roland goes up for his degree soon.’

‘It’s a queer thing,’ remarked Larry, not taking kindly to the bold feminine march of intellect. ‘Do you think it’s a safe thing to let ’em get ahead of the boys ? Give her a chance, and there’s no knowing what a woman will do. She does a power of mischief without the learning. What do girls want with universities ? There’ll be no holding of ’em down at all.’

‘Well’—here Captain Pennacove had to throw back his head and laugh sturdily at the other’s dismal acceptance of a fact and his evil

prognostication thereon—‘I don’t know much about other girls. I do know that my Una will never be less sweet than she is because she is clever. She’ll come in after Roland, that’s certain, and he is working hard.’

‘Per’aps,’ said Larry, with an idea brightening his sallow face, ‘that’s why he couldn’t come to-night.’

‘Come where?’

‘To the Virginia Arms. He said he’d come right enough, but I got this instead.’ He drew a note from his breast pocket. ‘Read it.’

The Captain read the following curt lines :

‘Roland Goldwin regrets not being able to keep his appointment with Mr. Washington Larry.’

‘Short, not sweet, ain’t it?’ commented its recipient. ‘And it ain’t like him. Do you think, now, it’s them books of his keeping him away after he promised to come?’

‘Very likely, or some friend may have dropped in. He’s too honest a fellow to wilfully break his word.’

‘He looks it, anyhow, and I’m longing for him. He’s Jerry’s own boy.’ Larry turned his eyes towards the piano, and, remembering what Roland had said in reference to Miss

Jessie Lockstud's number of relatives, he glared at Mountfu as he had at Jessie, and added, 'Is that a Lockstud?'

'No; that's Charlie Mountfu, a friend of ours. I'll call him over.—Here, Mountfu!' he called across the room; 'this is a friend of mine; haven't seen him over twenty years, and he's bleached out of recognition.'

Mountfu at this invitation to join the Captain went over to him, and shook hands cordially with Larry.

'Happy to make the acquaintance of any friend of Captain Pennacove's,' he said, and the words had scarcely left his lips when a door opened from the room which had once been occupied by Larry, and admitted a young lady.

Larry immediately displayed a snail-like tendency, but as he could not creep bodily into a shell, he drew in his tongue and forebore responding to Mountfu's heartiness as he had been ready to do a second previous, and drew himself together as if with sudden cold, and bent forward with both hands on his stick, standing upright between his knees.

It was only Una Pennacove, whose power of shedding brightness had not yet touched him, whose womanly sweetness was yet to draw incense from a woman-hater. Science tells us

that the shadow thrown upon the wall leaves its permanent trace there, to be made visible only under the requisite chemical process. An outline of our movements may be thus negatived on the very walls of our dwelling-houses, awaiting the action of the necessary agent to render it positive. But daily life holds up to us a similar lesson in simpler form. Love and duty in the home—be it palace or hut—record their story. Every deed, every word, every thought, sweetens the air, and needs no aid from the laboratory for the revelation of distinct impressions, a centrifugal force of an inward light shooting rays on all sides. Una Pennacove always made her presence felt for good. She had been dining this night with her friend Jessie Lockstud, but had hurried home to fulfil her promise to Mountfu for a singing lesson.

She entered with her hat still on, and not so flushed or happy as usual, just to tell her uncle she had returned, and to greet Mountfu ; but, seeing Roland's friend, she forgot to do both, and walked up to him at once to say, ' I did not know we were so soon to have the pleasure of welcoming you to your own house, Mr. Larry.'

Mr. Larry put his hand out to touch hers—

gloved, warm, and ardent in its pressure—and looked at the carpet as he replied :

‘ Thank you, miss.’

‘ And where did you leave Roland ?’ she asked, determined to put him at his ease, and believing the appointment to be kept.

‘ On the Gōbong platform.’

Larry’s hands shook on his stick as he stared at it.

‘ Oh, I mean to-night ; he was to meet you, I remember.’

‘ Couldn’t come ; sent me word.’

‘ Then something important must have prevented him, for his heart was set on having a long talk with you, I know.’

Larry turned to the Captain after a covert glance at his niece, and said :

‘ Then two of us are disappointed.’

But he looked relieved that this girl could endorse her uncle’s opinion on this subject, and in the glance there dawned something akin to respect, and a sluggish admiration for one who had helped to soothe his disappointment, that one actually being a woman.

Una looked thoughtful, and then, as if anxious to banish something unpleasant from her mind and his, persisted in standing there before him, pulling off her gloves and putting

questions about the new colony of Knutsford, while he, being compelled to answer, was made to talk till use made his tongue run freer and her less formidable.

Captain Pennacove said never a word, but was gloating over her pretty talk and sweet wiles. Mountfu, on the contrary, was fuming with impatience. Half an hour after, when she had disposed of her hat and gloves, and was about to commence the lesson, her uncle and Washington Larry being on the veranda smoking, he said to her reproachfully :

‘ I thought Sindbad would monopolize you all night.’

‘ Why Sindbad ?’ she asked, with her hands on the keys.

‘ Well, doesn’t he look as if he had an old man of the sea clinging to his neck ?’

‘ He is old and lonely, and may have troubles not to be shaken off. I wish I could relieve him.’

‘ Is everybody so fortunate in your wishes, I wonder ?’ he said, as he set a song before her, and noted that she was less lively—was even apathetic—as she allowed her hands to lie idly on the ivory notes and sighed, not wondering why Roland had broken his promise, but partly guessing. ‘ Have I offended you ?’ he was

compelled to ask presently, when she made no attempt to begin his accompaniment. 'Have I vexed you?'

'No,' she replied, aroused. 'Why, do I look offended or vexed?'

'You can never look anything but what you are.'

Una turned her head impatiently after an upward questioning glance at his face.

'You vex me when you talk nonsense,' she said; 'now sing, if you please.'

So she struck the opening chords of the song.

'A pretty pair!' remarked Larry thoughtfully, as he looked towards the piano through the window from the outside.

'A pretty pair,' echoed the Captain—'where? Una and Mountfu?'

'No,' from Larry emphatically—'Roland and her.'

'Oh! is that your game?' cried Captain Pennacove, who wished for nothing better than to see his darling Roland's bride a very few years hence. 'Well, to that I say Amen!'

By which it may be perceived that the faculty of match-making and pairing may be found in gray-headed old men, and is not confined to officious matrons and anxious mothers.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. CALLIPORT IS CRUEL TO BE KIND.

‘JESSIE.’

‘Yes, auntie.’

‘Fetch me my shawl as you come back.’

Jessie Lockstud, who was ungloving and unbonneting in a room adjoining Mrs. Calliport's bedroom, hurried from it, carrying the desired shawl to her aunt.

Mrs. Calliport, unlike Captain Pennacove, declared her years. Her pink-and-white skin had lost its freshness — was faded and discoloured ; her eyes, though retaining their keenness and tender depths, were sunken.

Asthma clung to her to make her breath painfully short in her old age, and whims and fancies of over twenty years ago were still in force. She had her dogs and her birds and her pensioners, and in the latter decade of her life had developed a strong faith in homœopathy

versus allopathy, believing it the more efficacious in her own case, and ever ready to try its effect or force it upon others as the one thing needful to meet and control their ailments. Her benevolent instincts made her thoughtful for everybody within her own little domain. And though she could be irritable at times, and liked to have her own way with the people about her, it did no more harm than a mild fog through which the sun pierces, for the predominant features of her character—firmness, generosity, and goodwill—ever recognised, rendered her beloved and shed warmth. Her nephew's children loved her. Roland Goldwin and Una Pennacove loved her, and to them, as to her nephews and nieces, she was 'Aunt Jessie.'

She, in her turn, was deeply attached to these young people, and was more satisfied than formerly with Lockstud, upon whom she looked as a reformed man, though certain reports of lavish hospitality and liberal expenditure in out-door pleasures reached her ears unpleasantly.

She refrained from sermonizing him now on profligacy for more reasons than one. Having attained his present position through his own merits, he had a right to dispose of his

means as he pleased, while anything like a protest from her would have been a mere beating of her hands in the air. Nevertheless, doubts of his prudence, and a fear that he was taking paces beyond his financial strength, would arise. He was located once again in the handsome home of Virginia Bay, from which circumstances had ousted him so long ago. But now it was his own, and in deference to his wife's wishes—a concession for which she could never be sufficiently grateful—he had called it Cecillambda, that she might thus enshrine the memory of their first-born. Strange it was to her to get her will with such ease, and stranger still when he escaped from her kiss and her thanks to hide an emotion never betrayed before.

‘He has changed,’ said Priscilla with a sigh that was thanksgiving.

‘He has changed,’ said Aunt Jessie likewise, for, much to her surprise, he had exhibited one afternoon traces of a quality with which she had never credited him, and that was a disinterested friendship.

He had come to ask her help in a small thing, he said.

‘May I look to you,’ he began, ‘to use your influence with Jessie? Will you nip something

in the bud? You can. She will listen to you and abide by you for love. If I speak she may be ruled out of fear, and feel oppressed by my authority. I don't want to oppress her, and I don't want her mother to have a say in it at all, for she will do more harm than good; you know she is not always capable of guiding aright, and is as simple as Jessie herself. You can do it best. I will put it in a nutshell. Roland Goldwin has been taught to make our home his, and is fond of all our children alike; but the silly girl does not think so. She believes he loves her—not as a sister—and she is all wrong. She shows him a great deal too much attention—in fact, devotion—and I will not have it.' And here Lockstud turned so white that Mrs. Calliport thought he must be ill, but he gave her no time to speak, as he went on, showing far more excitement than the subject seemed to warrant: 'I will not have it; it is a downright injustice to the lad, who is as soft as any girl, and easily led by the womenfolk. He is not like our Australian youth—has never mixed much with boys of his age or with the world at all. He is not shrewd, not practical a bit; he is dreamy, romantic, pliable to a fault in some things. He would promise to marry any woman out of sheer

gratitude if he thought she loved him so that he was necessary to her happiness. If he promised Jessie now, he would keep to his word if it killed him, and I won't have him led to such a promise. He will go abroad when he comes of age, and learn life and get his judgment matured. For me to stand by now a passive witness to any such promise made by a boy in the innocence and integrity of his heart will be to court his contempt when he becomes a man, and knows how his youth has been imposed upon. We will all be put down as anglers for the millionaire, as harpies binding him to a troth which had been forced upon him. If he were not what he is'—Lockstud here opened and shut his mouth in silence, as if it were dry and parched, before he finished his sentence—'I should not be so eager to protect him. He is a noble fellow, who thinks no more of Jessie than as a dear sister. I say this with certainty, and I ask if you think it is just?' His lips trembled with the earnestness of his words, and he looked at his aunt as though a full jury were concentrated in her, and a verdict affecting someone he loved was about to be spoken.

Mrs. Calliport was as much surprised at this spirited, unselfish view of Roland's future

as Roland had been at his mother's extravagant hate and passion spent over the name of Washington Larry. She was inclined to be more pleased with his sense of justice and this unexpected display of loftiness in a disposition which she had patiently accepted as one of entire greed, than she was with his appeal to her for assistance.

‘I think you are right,’ she said, ‘not to stand in the way of his future interests. Let him go abroad a free man, at all events, and if Jessie should be his own choice he will return to her of his own accord, and your conscience will be free. He can never accuse you of bait-throwing.’

‘Pshaw!’ cried Jessie’s father, gnawing hard at his moustache. ‘She will never be a fit mate for him, and you ought to hint as much to her. Roland wants the Lady Godiva kind—a woman to be a real help-mate and intelligent companion, with ideas above the ordinary woman, which Jessie has not. She will make an excellent wife, I dare say, some day, after her mother’s style, for superintending pies and puddings, washing babies and making pretty frocks. A woman of spirit, energy, and power she will never be, capable of maintaining the position and onerous duties which will fall on

the millionaire's wife. He ought not to be trammelled in his affections, as he certainly will be if he once thinks Jessie cares for him more than I wish her to for her own sake. I know what is best for her future happiness, and I also know what he is capable of doing—sacrificing himself now for the pleasure of another, and to rail against himself by-and-bye, perhaps, for a fool, and at us for rogues, when his views of the world shall become broader with experience. He need not look so far away, either, for such a wife as I have named. There's Una Pennacove, as grand a girl as there is going, with or without money. Any way, aunt, I shall be much obliged to you, more obliged than I can say, if you will speak to her, and knock this romantic nonsense out of her silly little head.'

'I will do as much as I can,' she promised, while she inwardly determined not to pain the girl more than she could help under the process of nipping in the bud a love which it was as natural for her to conceive for one like Roland Goldwin as it is for a flower to bloom in sunshine.

Besides, Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Lockstud had often talked quietly together over a possible union between the two, and desired it heartily, while Jessie, who had almost grown

side by side with him, believed they would go through life so, and were necessary to each other, and made no disguise of her real feeling for him before her relatives.

So Jessie walked nimbly towards Mrs. Calliport with the shawl one morning, about a week or so later on, she having been just deposited at her aunt's residence—the same as of yore—by the Lockstud brougham, which had carried off her younger sister Louisa from a short term of service or companionship to the beloved aunt, the aunt to whom Lockstud commanded every attention should be paid, because, as he impressed upon his children, her hoary head should be honoured, if even she were not dear to them by ties of blood. A sentiment praiseworthy indeed!

‘Here it is, auntie,’ said Jessie, winding the folds of a cream-white china crape shawl about the old lady, and beginning to refix the pillow at her back, and make her otherwise comfortable.

‘I am so glad it is my turn to come to you; I have such a lot to tell you.’

‘Have you, dear? Well sit down. You have brought your work with you, I see,’ Mrs. Calliport replied, with an eye on a dainty hand-bag hanging over Jessie's arm.

‘Yes, auntie, of course,’ said the girl, as she proceeded to draw from the bag a little heap of fancy work, and next sat down on a stool almost at the hem of her aunt’s dress. ‘You set me the example of having busy fingers always, don’t you?’

‘What is it now?’

‘A pair of slippers.’

‘For father?’

‘No; for Rol.’

Mrs. Calliport searched the pretty brown oval face, so artless and happy, bent over the canvas which was destined to become a slipper for Roland, and made no answer, because her heart failed her. This girl was her namesake, and secretly the favourite of her nephew’s children, more like grandchild than great-niece, so near and dear was she with her unsophisticated, unselfish, affectionate nature. She was so chatty that she overflowed with harmless gossip, sometimes incoherent, but always pleasant, and as reliable as any gazette as she told of the guests coming to her mother’s house, their ways and their looks and peculiarities.

This chatter relieved the old lady, who seldom went out now; and it made her love to have Jessie administering to her

wants, always smiling and light-hearted and gentle.

It made her nervous to think she must keep her promise to her nephew, and perhaps chase the brightness from his daughter's sweet face. A ball of white Shetland wool was lying for a second unheeded in her lap, with gleaming knitting-needles like a double axis running through it. This she took up presently when she removed her eyes from Jessie's face, and her fingers—always busy, as Jessie had affirmed—fastened on the needles, and sent them flashing on their mission, dropping and picking up stitches, and dexterously laying the foundation of a warm winter petticoat for one of her infant pensioners.

She made no reference to the slippers, but said :

‘ So you have a lot to tell me, Jessie. Well, I'm listening ; begin at the beginning.’

‘ It is not all pleasant, auntie.’

‘ No ? Anything wrong at home, dear ?’

‘ Well, not exactly ; but the trouble does touch one of us.’

‘ Meaning Miss Jessie Lockstud ?’ asked Aunt Jessie, with a smile at her random guess, and not over-concerned about the trouble, since Jessie was evidently not too much affected by it.

‘Well, yes ; meaning that very unimportant and insignificant little personage,’ replied Jessie, inclined to be serio-comic.

‘Well ?’

‘Do you know a man of the name of Larry, aunt—Washington Larry ?’

‘I believe I have seen or heard the name somewhere. It sounds familiar. What has he got to do with it ?’

‘Everything. He was a great friend—a very great friend of Roland’s father, and saved his life—oh, years and years ago.’

‘Ah ! now you give me a landmark, my dear. I don’t know him personally, but remember hearing of him, and not too favourably, through Mrs. Goldwin. He had a decided interest in her husband’s estate, I know, if anything had happened to the heir ; but that is pretty certain, I think, to cease. I thought he was dead.’

‘He is not dead. He ran off to Flindersland, Una says, when old Mr. Goldwin died, because he couldn’t bear Phillipia without him ; but now he has returned after more than twenty years.’

‘And how does he fit in with the trouble ?’

‘This way, auntie. You know Una and I went with Roland as usual to Gobong the other day. Well, this Mr. Larry was at Mr. Goldwin’s

grave, too. Una and I thought he was going to kiss Rol when they met, he put his face so close to his ; but he did not, and after that Rol introduced him to us. But he never said a word, and frowned at me horribly ; and I resented it, but was sorry afterwards. I called him "an ogre," and Rol was vexed with me. He looked so hurt, auntie ; and I never vexed him before, that I can remember. It was when we were coming home, and Rol was enthusiastic over the old man, and I could not be. That was the beginning of the trouble. Rol made an appointment to meet his father's friend that night, and never kept it ; that also meant trouble—for Rol this time—because his mother told him Mr. Larry had behaved badly to her a long time ago, and Rol thinks it right to take up his mother's cudgels. He never told us what she said, only that he had determined to avoid Mr. Larry, for fear he might say something he would be sorry for ; and papa thinks he is quite right, and the Captain and Una think he is quite wrong, and here is the mischief of it all. Mr. Larry has been asked to stay at Unaville, and is now a guest there. So Rol won't go there, and I can't go there ; and we are both shut out through that old man, who is, after all, just what I called him.'

‘Dear me!’ exclaimed Mrs. Calliport, ‘how very uncomfortable! It would have been better if he had remained at North Flindersland with the blacks and the alligators.’

Mrs. Calliport, partly through misrepresentation, had some distorted notion that old North Flindersland was a vast forsaken country, where alligators and blacks were not probably the worst features to meet the exploit-loving salamander creatures who dared to reside there.

‘I wish he had then, auntie. You see, papa sides with Rol; and not only that, forbids *us* from visiting Unaville as well. Una came home to dinner with me when we returned from Gobong, and of course we spoke of Mr. Larry over the table. Well, you know, auntie, papa is never loud in his passion; but I think he forgot himself that night, and before Una, too. He had that frown which terrifies us so when we mentioned the name of Larry—Washington Larry. He banged his fist on the table, and said to me, “He is a contemptible boor. How dare you speak to a fellow like that! If you do it again, or any of you, you shall rue it. Miss Pennacove, of course, may or may not, as she pleases.” And then he remained sulky through the meal, and we were all afraid to raise our voices above a whisper.

I am sure I don't want Mr. Larry; he is a horrid old man, and I dare say he did something dreadful, or else why should Roland be against him, too ?'

'I don't know, dear. Mrs. Goldwin is bitter against him for some reason, and perhaps your father knows why. Roland, of course, knows a son's duty.'

Mrs. Calliport shook her head gravely over her knitting. Her nephew had been reticent about many things, and this was evidently one of them.

'But, auntie, Roland is unhappy, though he knows his duty and does it. The Pennacoves think he is straining it, and that Mr. Larry ought not to be condemned entirely on his mother's word; but, of course, they can't tell him that. And he is miserable because he can't go to Unaville in the old free way. He told me so yesterday, and says his mind is so unsettled that he can't study; and I tried to say something wise and comforting and couldn't. Una would have known exactly what to say. He came to me miserable and went away miserable, and, of course, I was miserable, too.'

Here was Aunt Jessie's opportunity to keep her promise. She caught at it desperately,

and said as firmly as possible, with a hand on Jessie's head for a moment :

'You must not be too fond of him, dear.'

'Why?' Jessie flushed to the roots of her hair. 'Is it wrong to be fond of him—of Roland Goldwin?'

'That depends entirely upon circumstances.'

'Please tell me exactly what you mean.'

Jessie allowed her work to remain idly in her lap, and lifted up a questioning face to her aunt.

'Do you know that he will soon be a millionaire?'

Mrs. Calliport also neglected her work, and only looked kindly upon the upturned face.

'Yes; and hasn't he told us what he hopes to do?'

"Us!" "told us!" He tells you all alike, then?

'No, not all; sometimes mother, but mostly to Una and me, if it is anything he doesn't want all to know.'

'But, child, has he ever told you anything which not even Una has been told?'

'I don't think so. Jack calls Una and me the "Siamese sisters," because we are so much together and tell each other everything. I don't think Una is in ignorance of anything that he has told me.'

Aunt Jessie now caught her niece's chin

between her thumb and forefinger gently to lift her face up still higher, and said :

‘ That is not exactly what I mean. I had better put the question straightforward to you. Has he ever asked you to be his wife ?’

‘ That would be much the same as for me to ask you if you cared for me ; and why should I ask such a useless question ?’ Jessie smiled ; she could not understand the drift of the subject. ‘ I have been expecting to be his wife since I was twelve years old, and he knows it,’ she added.

Her thorough trust in Roland’s love was pathetic. She did not accept his warm affection as fraternal, or think his gifts and occasional caresses were bestowed upon her with the freedom and fondness of a brother—that he felt a close and life-long intimacy permitted a brother’s privileges. But she did notice that his manner towards Una Pennacove was less pronounced in easy familiarity, though Una was a valued friend and a constant companion too. And she construed it according to her lights, but with an erring judgment.

‘ He knows it !’ echoed Mrs. Calliport, with surprise in her tones and her countenance alike. ‘ You don’t mean to say that *you* have told *him* you mean to marry him ?’

‘ Oh, auntie, what an absurd thing to think of me ! ’ Jessie tossed her chin out of her aunt’s fingers a little impatiently. ‘ I mean, when I say that, that he *must* know I care for him before all the world. If he were a poor man to-morrow it would be all the same.’

Mrs. Calliport repressed a sigh, and her old hand went again to fondle Jessie’s head and play with the nut-brown tresses in silence for a moment.

‘ But, my darling,’ she went on presently, with nervous articulation, ‘ it seems to me that he shows much the same attention to your friend Una as he does to you. You can’t both marry him.’ This with a forced smile. ‘ Don’t think.’ she added quickly, ‘ that I want to drive all hope from you, but only to advise you for the best. If Una were in your place now, I would say to her, too, “ You must not be too fond of Roland ; and, what is more, you ought not to let him see that you are ; that is the most important.” ’

‘ Why ? ’ asked Jessie again, this time looking down into her lap, and pulling and twisting at her silks.

She put the question very softly, very humbly, with a little fear making her heart sicken—a fear that she had behaved unmaidenly in her

confidence in his reciprocal feeling. It had never occurred to her before that anything could ever happen to separate their lives. They would go on like children together hand-in-hand, she had been thinking until now. His life was as part of hers, and with the thought of making a sudden effort to do the right and hold herself more aloof, and ceasing to show him that actual devotion which her father had been quick to detect, she turned pale as she asked 'Why?'

'Because it is the man's place to begin at devotion. If he loves he will tell his love in a thousand ways, but men mostly like to begin the wooing, and are not to be taught or influenced through the premature devotion freely offered by a woman. If Rol loved you, dear, as you think, he would have told you so; but he is little more than a boy, not knowing what it means to love, perhaps. He will go abroad when of age. Let him go a free man, unfettered with promises of marriage. Let him mix with men of the world, and other women besides those within his narrow circle of friends at present. He is too ingenuous, too upright, to break his troth once given—and remember he has not given you his word; but if he thought he was so dear to you, he would give

it you to spare you pain, and perhaps out of a soft gratitude for the affection you openly declare. Do you understand me now, and why I speak to you so? I would not willingly pain you.'

Jessie twisted her skeins into hopeless knots, and bowed her head to give an affirmative. She could not speak, and Mrs. Calliport's fingers, busy at the curly fibrils of the girl's hair prettily astray, trembled like her voice as she went on :

'If he comes back to you and says, "Jessie, I have seen many women, but for me you excel them all," then, dear, you are safe. It will save you future tears to learn this lesson. Wait—you and he are so young—and you will then have a test of the feeling he entertains for you, whether it be that of a fond brother or passionate lover.'

Thus Mrs. Calliport fulfilled her promise to her nephew, and as tenderly as possible operated with a thin wedge of reason, inserting it like a lever into the heart of his daughter, to produce an outlet for the surplus love stored there for Roland Goldwin, aware that by the same rule she was creating an inlet for a rush of pain as strong as the passion.

The effect was a temporary suffocation, which

made Jessie put her two little hands one over the other at her throat, as though to press back that something there which seemed to be choking her. There was a knot at Mrs. Calliport's throat, too, as she bent over Jessie, and placed both her hands on her head as if to bless.

'My child,' she said, 'I have distressed you, but don't fret. It is the dearest wish of mine that you and no other should be his choice. He will come back, perhaps, loving you as you deserve to be loved, dear, and all will be well again. I only ask you not to let him see how dear he is to you.'

Jessie let her head fall on her aunt's lap, and she managed to say :

'I will not stand in his light.'

'I know you are a dear, good girl,' said Mrs. Calliport, quivering with sympathy, for she knew now that it was not to nip a girl's romantic attachment in the bud for which she had been working, but to crush the full-blown flower of a woman's strong and deep love. She had not crushed it, however, and knew it when Jessie lifted her face colourless and sad to hers, and said :

'Auntie, whether he cares for me or not, I shall always love him. I love him now with

all my heart, and soul, and might. I love him so much that I could just go away and hide myself somewhere, and try to smile too, if my hiding away would relieve him or help to make him happier. You must have a reason for thinking he does not care for me as much as I care for him.' She rested her arms on Mrs. Calliport's knees, and searched her face. 'Tell me, auntie dear,' she pleaded simply. 'Is it Una he is fondest of? You must know, or you would not be so anxious to put me right.'

'Dear child, of that I know nothing,' cried Mrs. Calliport, catching at the girl's hands to hold them within her own. 'What I do know is that you, for your own peace of mind's sake, must try not to think of him as a lover, not to show your heart unless he asks you to do so, and *not* to give up hope entirely because of what I have said.'

'Perhaps I have been silly,' murmured Jessie. 'You shall see that I can be wise. I must not stand in his light, of course; but, then, I always thought I was the light itself, and have been all wrong.'

Theodore Lockstud would have been more than satisfied to have known how successfully his aunt had acted as his coadjutrix, and what resolutions were arising in his daughter's breast

as a result of her counsel. He did quite right to enlist his aunt in his service, and ought to have left well alone ; that he did not was but another strand for the rope he was weaving for his own entanglement.

Jessie meant to be brave. She had the spirit of self-sacrifice, but lacked the necessary stamina to support it boldly and make it a concrete heroism. Built upon a warm and generous impulse to do right, it yet threatened to relax or shrink with a contrary breath.

CHAPTER IV.

JESSIE CLUTCHES AT HEROISM.

THE afternoon of the day which had suddenly turned over a new and cloudy page for Jessie, when she was half longing, half dreading, to meet Roland, scarcely knowing how to sink self and try to be somebody else altogether in his presence, Mrs. Goldwin paid one of her ceremonial visits to Mrs. Calliport.

Since Mr. Goldwin's death her attentions in this quarter were simply polite, and never self-denying, as her infatuated husband had once believed them to be, but Mrs. Calliport never.

Jessie was in the room, but sat quietly enough at a window a few feet distant, and, as it happened, that very same window through which her mother had first beheld the woman who had since influenced her life for harm and sorrow.

She was working—not at the slipper, for it

had been cast aside, like the joy which had once been hers, not buried quite, but prepared for burial—and her head was bent over some elaborate embroidery which seemed to occupy all her thought; for she gave no heed to the dialogue which was being carried on by her aunt and Mrs. Goldwin, the latter having interested the former with the recital of a wonderful cure under homœopathic treatment, which excited an animated discussion, and hoisted Mrs. Calliport at once to her hobby.

The conversation was not enlivening or attractive to Jessie until the name that was uppermost in her mind continually reached her ears.

‘I wish, then, you could give me something for Roland,’ said Mrs. Goldwin, ‘since his complaint is beyond me, and all the doctors, I am sure. He made me feel utterly wretched last night, and spoiled my night’s rest. He goes about the house with a long face, and doesn’t eat in the usual way, and all the satisfaction I get when asking what’s the matter is, “Nothing, nothing,” and a look which says as plainly as possible, “Mind your own business.” After the way I have devoted my life to him, I must say he is a disappointment. He certainly is peculiar and reticent when he should not be, and I have

serious intentions of making him give up study for a time, and postpone going up for his exam.'

'That would be a pity, for it may not be over-study that affects him,' answered Mrs. Calliport, with a swift glance thrown towards the girl, who was listening now intently, and not working at all.

'It will make him tell me what ails him, and show me what to do; I am not going to have him ill.'

Mrs. Calliport stooped to stroke a silky poodle coiled at her feet, and lifted it to her lap to fondle there, not caring to answer this as it deserved, knowing the anxiety evinced was for Roland's mother, and not Roland.

'He may be in debt,' continued Mrs. Goldwin—for all I know, head over heels—for he does the most quixotic things possible with his money, and finds it gone not knowing how, and is afraid to tell me. That shows what it is to let a boy have the handling of too much money. But it is not with my will.'

'You wrong him,' suddenly cried Jessie, unable to bear this erring judgment without refuting it. 'He is not in debt. He is unhappy, and I know why.'

'Oh, you know why?' Mrs. Goldwin looked

towards the slender childish figure, and laughed as if amused. 'Come, this is not so bad. So you are his father confessor, eh? Well, since you do know, pray enlighten me.'

Jessie coloured, and felt not unlike a poor little mouse in the claw of a cat for sport. What little mettle she had, however, urged her to assert herself with a dignity scarcely expected from one upon whom Mrs. Goldwin looked as a decidedly insignificant girl—'a chit,' as she affirmed.

But having said so much, Jessie was bound to support her statement with proof, and therefore replied :

'He is unhappy because he can't go to Unaville, and fears he may offend the Pennacoves.'

'Can't go to Unaville?' echoed Mrs. Goldwin, 'and what hinders him? Not I, though they are no particular friends of mine, and some mothers would under those conditions.'

'He won't go there because of their guest, Mr. Larry,' spoke up Jessie in Roland's defence, 'and because he is everything a son ought to be, and is not what you say.'

Mrs. Goldwin might have laughed again at this girl's championship but for hearing Washington Larry was the guest of the Pennacoves.

The sneer in her words and on her lips fell a prey at once to a stronger expression which absorbed it completely, and presented itself on her features boldly as malicious hate not un-mixed with fear.

‘I think some people are mad,’ she exclaimed. ‘Who but lunatics would ask such a man to be their guest—a gorilla, a sneaking Paul Pry of a fellow ; a low, ill-bred, illiterate brute ?’

‘He was your guest once and your husband’s friend,’ calmly reminded Mrs. Calliport, who did not quite favour the vindictive attitude against Mr. Larry, or words so coarsely chosen in ungovernable aversion.

‘Yes, he was ; that’s true,’ came a quick retort ; ‘because Mr. Goldwin believed he owed him so much. An aboriginal might have done him a service, and I believe he would have invited him to dinner. I am a bit tired of hearing of Mr. Larry. He always was a worry, and now, instead of being dead and buried, as he ought to be, he turns up again and makes trouble.’ And then Mrs. Goldwin turned sharply on Jessie, whose face was averted and at the window : ‘No doubt Roland has told you that he is a martyr to a woman’s whim, that I have been exacting, and all the rest of it. It seems that he can gossip

enough outside to anybody, and would never tell me that the man was stopping at Unaville.'

'You are quite mistaken,' said Jessie chokingly, as she turned her face full upon Roland's mother. 'He never made a single complaint against you. He only said that Mr. Larry had behaved badly to you a long time ago, and that while it was for your son to resent it, he still felt a lingering regard for the old man who was his father's friend, and so avoided going where he should have to meet him, and perhaps say words that he might be sorry for afterwards, and that he was between two fires.'

Mrs. Goldwin was too much engrossed with the subject as it touched herself to notice the ring of passionate earnestness in Jessie's vindication, which, like a counter-irritant, took the fire out of her veins and the demon out of her face, as she said, half apologetically for her display of rancour:

'Well, if you knew what a snake in the grass that man has been you would not wonder at me hating him as I do. I never told Roland he was not to speak to him, but that I would not have him at Goolgun.'

Literally this was true, though she had meant him so to construe her words. She was so far relieved by Jessie's explanation

that she turned to her a second time, but with a milder bearing, which was unobserved, for the girl's head was lowered and her eyes cast down, while Aunt Jessie was feeding the poodle with biscuits, and thinking that Mrs. Goldwin was not unlike a hedgehog, bristled all over for self-defence, ready to prick her supposed adversaries if they touched her ever so lightly. Her next sentences, however, were not so appeasing to Jessie as Jessie's had been to her.

'It pleases me,' she went on now with an easy amiability, 'that Miss Una, if she chooses, can take a lesson from him in that filial duty which is but a tribute to my discipline. I am not so exacting, and he has misunderstood me. I value his happiness too highly to let it be balked through such a slight cause, and if he can't be happy away from Una he has my permission to go to her or meet her friend—a demented old man—and be as quixotic over him as he likes. Una is not to my taste, and why he worships her as he does I don't know, but I do not interfere with his likes and dislikes.' With this she rose to take her leave, and in saying good-bye to Jessie she added: 'You look as if you were stifled, child. You should be skipping or trundling a hoop instead of being cooped up in the house.'

Jessie, who certainly looked white to the lips, was unable to answer her with a little saucy retort, such as she might have given at any other time; but when Mrs. Goldwin was in her carriage and on her way to pay a visit elsewhere, she said piteously to Aunt Jessie:

‘She always treats me and speaks to me as if I were a baby.’ And then, with a quick movement to avert her face from Mrs. Calliport’s tender gaze, her brown eyes swam with tears, and her heart felt like a stone in her breast.

Mrs. Calliport heard a distinct sob, and knew quite well that although Mrs. Goldwin was responsible for it, it was not because she had provokingly ignored Jessie’s womanhood.

‘My dear, I believe she is the most disagreeable of disagreeable women, and can say the most disagreeable things,’ replied Aunt Jessie. ‘Don’t let her annoy you.’

There was an undercurrent of infinite compassion in this latter sentence which told Jessie she was understood, and made her tears rain faster.

Half dreading, and yet desperately longing to see Roland again, she was scarcely able to analyze the wild emotion which overcame her

that night when he entered her aunt's drawing-room, and through not having seen her for a couple of days, perhaps put more earnestness than usual into his fraternal kiss. It has been previously stated why he laid claim to a brother's prerogative to tease or to kiss, to scold or caress, to love and to protect.

He found her lips icy cold and unresponsive, and seeing her with a book in hand from which she had been reading aloud to Mrs. Calliport, he attributed her pallor and chill to some sensational matter drawn from it; so with a gentle force he drew the book from her hold, and said :

‘I can't allow this. What love and murder trash is here to make you look and feel like a ghost?’

‘Love and murder!’ echoed Jessie stupidly, as he held the book at arm's-length away from her.

‘My dear boy,’ explained Aunt Jessie, and not without a smile, for, unlike her niece, she was not too much overwrought to grasp the humour of the moment—‘my dear boy, it is only “Ruddock's Homœopathy.” What are you talking about?’

Roland threw the book on to a table and laughed. He was not looking forlorn, as

Jessie had seen him last ; on the contrary, there was that brightness over him flashing from eyes and lips, which was as sunshine. His speech and his movements were mercurial. He laughed heartily as the book flew from his hand, and he said lightly :

‘Then she’s been reading up symptoms, Aunt Jessie, a dangerous practice for laymen, and she thinks she has experienced them, and has incipient typhus or small-pox.’

‘She was just reading a paragraph about chills and their remedy, that’s all,’ laughed the old lady.

But poor Jessie, within her own cloud of misery, was invulnerable to anything like mirth, and could have exclaimed in Hood’s words :

‘I would that I were dead now,
Or up in my bed now,
To cover my head now,
And have a good cry.’

‘Then what is it, Mid ?’ he asked, relapsing into gravity, and looking at her with gentle sympathy. ‘Are you not well ?’

‘I don’t think she is quite herself,’ said Aunt Jessie quickly. ‘Go to the dining-room, dear, and take a glass of wine ; it will warm you.’

Jessie recognised the ruse to give her

privacy for a time, and with a grateful look at her aunt hurried from the room.

Roland became restless when quite ten minutes elapsed and she had not returned; his manner was preoccupied as he listened and talked to Mrs. Calliport, and he was impelled at last to rise from his chair and say :

‘Would you mind me going to the dining-room for Mid and bringing her back? I have not long to stay, and I have something to tell her that will be pleasing.’

Mrs. Calliport, who could find no rational excuse for detaining him, assented at once.

‘If he loves her more than as a brother,’ she reflected when she was alone, ‘why, it will all come right in the end. God grant it may!’

But then how could she know that he already had a day-dream of his own, in which was reared a palatial home of no likeness to Goolgun, by whose cheery hearth he had planted a second self, a helpful mate of face and form bearing no semblance to Jessie’s, and toddling, lisping children with golden hair and limpid, dark-blue eyes with deep-fringed lids, totally unlike her, but counterparts of that one whose soul was reflected on his own—that one to whom it had gone forth, drawn by that

wondrous affinity which alone means the quintessence of love?

Jessie was standing at a chiffonier, one hand on a decanter, the other on a wineglass, as if she were debating on the matter of drinking the wine or not, when Roland stole up behind her and laid his hand over her eyes.

‘Oh, Rol, don’t!’ she cried, jerking her words, and pulling down his hand, the touch of which she knew so well.

She looked so alarmed that he put his arm round her waist and said, with some compunction :

‘I did not mean to startle you, Mid—only to punish you for stopping away so long. I am in a bit of a hurry, and have come to tell you something. But just swallow some wine first, if you have not already done so. You have been here long enough to have drained the decanter.’

She poured out a thimbleful and drank it. It came quite naturally to her to obey him.

‘Now do you feel better?’

‘Yes,’ she answered feebly, thinking she had never felt so ill in her life.

‘Well, sit down and listen till I unfold my plain, unvarnished tale.’

She sat down and tried to smile, because she

guessed his 'something to tell' was of a pleasant nature, judging from his merry mood. Her impulse was to put her hands upon his shoulders, but she only folded them in her lap, while her eyes looked anywhere but at him, as he stood over her and prefaced his communication rather abruptly :

'Mid, my mother is caprice personified.'

Mid nodded her head in affirmation.

'Do you know what a kindness you have done for me ?' he asked, and Jessie looked up with questioning eyes for a second, but did not speak.

'I received something painfully like abuse this evening, because I had offended the Pennacoves. You told her that I had done so.'

'Yes, I did—because—because——' faltered the girl.

'Never mind, Mid,' Roland interrupted. 'There is no need to defend yourself. I know all about it, and thank you with all my heart.'

Jessie raised her eyes again, but now swimming in tears.

'Don't fret for me, my dear, for out of the evil hath come a good,' he said, noting her distress, but not aware of its source. 'She reproached me for giving a handle to them to find fault with her and think her an exacting,

hard-natured woman. She said she never meant me to take up the matter with Mr. Larry quite so literally. What she did mean was that she would not speak to him or have him at Goolgun, and that I had treated her shamefully in not telling her that he was a guest of the Pennacoves, and for going about the place half alive because of a voluntary exile from Unaville, for which I would have her blamed and myself lauded as a pattern of filial martyrdom.'

'Oh!' half sobbed Jessie; 'how could she—how could she?'

'She did, and you know what I have been trying to do—trying to atone to her by the faithful fulfilment of stern duty for the absence of a son's natural affection, which her manner and habit have chilled. She told me this man had insulted her. Was it not for me to treat him with indifference and avoid intercourse as I have done? But it seems as if I have been too much of a slave to this rule of duty. I have been fighting with shadows because of a woman's extravagant hate and rage, which coloured his offence so highly in my sight. I don't believe now that he is to be condemned, and it is all your doing, Middie, thanks again; and I'm going when I leave here to see Una, and tell her what a fool I have been all this time.'

‘I thought she would release you,’ said Jessie quietly, with her fingers still at her lap, nervously interlacing. ‘She said she valued your happiness too highly to let it be balked through Mr. Larry.’

A momentary frown, almost sardonic, disfigured Roland’s boyish, frank face—a passing thundercloud before the clear sky—the heaven that smiled from his eyes. Jessie, noting it, forgot her prescribed *rôle* in that second, and, starting up, put forth her hand to set its palm over his brows with her wonted freedom, as she cried :

‘Don’t look so, Rol! Oh, don’t!’

‘Look how?’ he asked, catching her cold little hand in one of his own and drawing her nearer to him. ‘Must I not frown where frowns are provoked?’

Irresistibly she allowed his arm to wind around her as she replied :

‘You have a right to frown, surely, but don’t frown that way, Rol. You looked like papa when he says cruel things sometimes—cutting things—and it hurt me to see his angry look on your face, that’s all.’

‘Poor little Mid! I will try not to frown so again. Do you know, when my mother said she “valued my happiness too highly” she

used the wrong word? For "happiness" read "health"; for, Mid, my life is precious to her until the remnant of that part of it which the law styles "infancy" shall have expired. In a little time I shall be twenty-one, and she will have piloted me safely through the years which have secured competence to her. My life is precious for her own sake, not mine. I have learned that only lately. My death within the term of legal infancy would be comparative poverty for her. My father willed it so. Why, I do not know; but there it is, Mid, in a nutshell. The sentence has been revoked for fear it might affect my system, or lead to suicide, perhaps. Who knows? And if it had not such a ring of tragedy in it for me, I should only see the comical side and laugh. As it is, I frown—frown at the fate which forces me to condemn my own mother, excites my contempt for her.'

It was only to Jessie or Una that Roland thus aired his one great trouble—his peculiar domestic conditions. They shared his sorrows and joys, and counteracted the gloom of home. Probably their sympathy and affection stood like trusty sentinels to bar the intrusion of splenetic humours, which otherwise might have wormed themselves into a sweet nature, to lodge

there permanently and warp and twist it. Only Una and Jessie knew of this crumpled leaf in his bed of roses, and how much it affected him.

‘Poor old Rol!’ sighed Jessie, and then a tremor ran through her slight frame; and she suddenly released herself from his hold, changing to chilliness from extreme warmth. ‘Come, let us go back to aunt,’ she said.

‘A kiss first, Mid, to take the bitterness out of my mouth.’

Roland bent forward to suit the action to the word; but she repelled him, and stood aloof with words and manner meant to be vivacious, but a sad failure.

‘Don’t be silly. Let us go to aunt.’

He looked at her wonderingly, and was a little offended.

‘Can all women be capricious?’ he thought. ‘Does it come naturally to them as they near maturity?’

They returned to Mrs. Calliport; but Roland did not stay long, being eager to meet Una; and in bidding good-bye he made no attempt to touch Jessie’s lips. He was vexed and constrained, and left her with a stiff hand-shake. All so different to what it had been before, reflected poor Jessie. The boy and girl nonsense was over for him. She was not ‘all in

all,' and with her it was 'Love me not at all or all in all.' Had not Mrs. Goldwin said he worshipped Una?

Mrs. Calliport took her in her embrace when Roland was gone, and whispered, 'Brave little girl!'

But I am afraid Jessie was not brave by any means, for she gave way at that password to her heart, and cried bitterly in Mrs. Calliport's arms.

CHAPTER V.

THE BREACH REPAIRED.

UNA was alone; the Captain and his guest, Mr. Larry, had gone to the theatre after a vain endeavour to make her accompany them. The servants were in their own quarters at the rear, and papers and books were strewed over Miss Pennacove's table in her own little study upstairs, awaiting her to finish that writing which she had pleaded as her excuse to stay at home, but which was neglected after all.

She remained in the drawing-room where her uncle had left her, and, instead of going upstairs to work, she sat down at an open window to dream.

The gas was turned to a low jet, and she, half concealed in shadow, sat with her right elbow on the window-sill, her right hand supporting her chin, tilted heavenward, as she gazed at the myriads of twinkling opal-rayed

stars, and tried to study a problem which had nothing in common with her University curriculum—the problem of life itself, with its intricate network, its maze of human emotions, aspirations, doubts, fears, from which there can be no outlet till the great scythe falls to cleave a pass to the unknown life beyond.

‘And all her thoughts as fair within her eyes,
As bottom agates seen to wave and float
In crystal currents of clear morning seas.’

So writes the Laureate of one of his loveliest creatures cast from fiction’s mould ; so let Una’s eyes be accepted by the reader, with their blue of Italian skies, their limpid depths, and soul-filled purity.

There were no tears in them, yet had they belonged to one of weaker will there might have been ; for Una found no solution to the problem, and pensiveness ruled her features, and those wonderful eyes were fixed in thought and shadowed, until a figure outlined in the darkness, at the wicket in front of her, called them from heaven to earth. Something familiar in the figure riveted her gaze, as she saw it pass through the wicket and quickly advance up the gravel pathway to the house. Her sadness suddenly took flight—an imp dethroned—and joy reigned in its stead.

She shifted her position at the window ; next hurried to turn up the gas, and waited to hear the door-bell peal its summons to the servant in attendance. Then footsteps hurrying across the hall ; the door-bolt drawn ; a man's voice, and the servant's reply : ' In the drawing-room, sir.'

Mechanically, as the drawing-room door opened, she stretched out both hands and met Roland on the threshold.

' You have come to us at last !' she cried. ' You will say " I forgive " to a poor old man whose only sin was fidelity to your father ! Oh, Rol, Rol ! I have learned so much from uncle about that fidelity ; don't ask me to speak of it to you—I must not ; only think kindly of Mr. Larry, and all will be as it was.'

' And I, Una—shall I stand the same with you ? I, a penitent, suing your pardon and leniency ?'

He kept her hands locked in his as they stood under the bright gaslight.

' Oh, yes, yes ; for uncle, for Mr. Larry and me. We know you are not to blame, Rol. We have been sorry for you in your determination to do what you believed to be right. You don't believe it now, else you would not be here. Of course, you were right in your

endeavour to stand up for your mother ; but you have come to see that you were wrong to act so unjustly towards Mr. Larry upon an evidence not thoroughly substantiated by others as witnesses.' This was equivalent to an assertion against his mother as a full and reliable authority. Roland understood it so, and merely bowed his head. 'Rol,' continued Una, 'why will people wrangle when peace must bring heaven so near earth ?'

Roland smiled.

'Your hair will turn prematurely gray,' he said, 'if you worry your brains to find an answer.'

'Come and sit down, sir,' she replied, assuming anger. 'I am not satisfied with your answer, which is no answer to my question at all.' She drew her hands from his hold and walked to her favourite seat at the window. He followed her, and sat down by her side. 'Now say something sensible, please,' she began.

'What can I say, unless to offer a truism ? Earth is far from heaven, and men are not saints ; though here and there, happily, wingless angels tread the earth to shed glory on mankind and give a glimpse of heaven.' Roland looked into Una's eyes, and thought he beheld

that glimpse shining there on him. 'I have been at discord with myself,' he added—'have been a fool, and that's the truth. You know I have been tied to what I considered a moral chain, tied there with my own hands—have fastened myself up for fear of breaking through a principle of duty ; have chafed at the chain like a prisoner manacled, until she, who compelled me to use it, snapped it all in a second, and that through Mid—our simple, loving Mid.'

'Through Mid?' cried Una, in smiling surprise.

'Yes ; fancy Mid, dear little mouse, gnawing at the net—not of the lion, but of a silly individual ! She had audacity enough to defend me to-day when I was attacked. You know how fond my mother is of me, how she is scared if I complain of ache or pain.' Here the frown that had alarmed Jessie darkened his face for a second again as he went on with bitter irony : 'Evidently she detected the yellow flag flying over my head, feared sickness on board the *Roland Goldwin*, and Mid up and told her where the mischief lay ; so she, like a devoted mother, trembled for my health and severed the chain which bound me to an unhealthy port, and let me go free on my own route again. She said a great deal that was

unjust and unkind, but that is her playful manner. I was sorely provoked, but am not now ; for you are the ship's doctor, Una, the ship which is to tow her into a comfortable haven, and has towed her all through, and which, when its mission shall be fulfilled, may sink or swim for all she cares.'

Una sighed in sympathy. She knew of the intricacies of Mr. Goldwin's will, but was not aware till this minute that Roland likewise knew. Never disposed to admire or feel friendly towards Mrs. Goldwin, she was still disinclined to inveigh against her, for she was Roland's mother, and it was for her to try and establish that peace between mother and son which she loved to see dwell amongst men.

Larry, stung with disappointment at not being able to continue a friendship with Jerry's boy, so well begun, attributed it to Mrs. Goldwin's influence, and, still more embittered against her, took care to refresh his host's memory in reference to many things concerning her past, which the swift passage of years had partly obliterated, and the captain in his turn detailed incidents in a milder way, and not with Larry's peculiar embellishments, to his niece, who found it difficult to offer, as usual, when people were censorious in her presence,

the kind word that might serve to recommend the imperious Mrs. Goldwin to mercy or lenity. She struggled to find it for Roland.

‘Your mother’s life has possibly been soured in some way,’ she said to him. ‘She is a miserable, unhappy woman, with a mind or heart deformed for want of the proper early training, perhaps. Forgive her, Rol, and forget her injustice. Be content, since you have nothing to reproach yourself with.’

‘I can do that if I know that Mr. Larry is not hurt with me.’

‘Well, he is not hurt with *you*, but is bitter against your mother. He has said such things of you, sir, that the risk of making you vain bids me keep them to myself. But know this, for your peace of mind, if you were a highwayman he’d find excuses for you. His heart can’t be steeled against Jerry’s boy—he always calls you so—and it is a big generous heart that covers a multitude of trifling faults, the fruits of rough association, and is so full of gratitude that it colours all his words when he speaks of your father and your father’s son—the gratitude that Aristotle says is the thing soonest effaced from the human heart. Its existence in him makes me forget his queer little ways and invests him with nobility.’

‘You have a knack of ferreting out, or, rather, raising to the surface, the cream of natures, and keeping back the scum. If I do it too, you have taught me.’

‘I do wish people would try to understand each other better,’ she said; ‘there would be fewer quarrels, fewer misfortunes, and happier homes.’

‘We suffer for the capsizing of Pandora’s box,’ said Roland. ‘Misfortunes are here, and always will be, whether she scattered them or not.’

‘I wish they were a myth, like Pandora herself—a fable to tell, but not stern reality. Oh for the millennium or some sort of Utopia!’

‘Not Utopia, Una. Not a see-saw existence like that, balanced on one pivot. Never to soar as high as the skies or penetrate to the depths of the earth, but always a monotonous swing according to a certain rule. Not a leather-clothed people with luxuries unknown and dull, unambitious lives, without aspirations and artistic tastes. Art would die in such an atmosphere, and competition be strangled. Where would be the glory of success?’

‘And failure would be unknown, remember.’

‘That in itself would be a misfortune, perhaps,’ he argued. ‘Failure begets success

more often than not. It is not unlike a black draught, nauseous enough, but salutary in the end—a stern friend to rule us to higher and better things sometimes, where the creature ruled is really capable of higher and better things.’

‘And if you should fail when you go up for your B.A. exam., will you not be disappointed?’

‘Of course I shall, but it will determine me to work until I do succeed. I will compete over and over again. Competition is a splendid whip; it drives ambition, and ambition—a fiery steed—sets the world’s wheels spinning. To ambition we owe study and research, to study and research the scientific wonders of the present day. It is a grand world, Una, and though we can never expect all men to think alike, any more than they can look alike, I feel sure we are almost on the eve of discovering some scheme of political economy which shall lift beggars from the streets, clothe the poor, feed the hungry, and make men realize that it is a grand world, and worship God the Giver as the one common Father of benefits.’

‘And will there ever come a time when friends shall never exchange bitter hard words, when brethren shall dwell together in unity?’ asked Una again.

““Ever” is a closed vista to us, who can’t see beyond the hour, or minute even. Wars, civil commotions, antipathies, exist, and have existed, for a purpose. Such men as Napoleon and Alexander, bloodthirsty and cruelly ambitious as they were, have quickened intellect and strengthened morality. The Fire of London swept away the lingering germs of the fatal plague.’

‘Then you think the whirligig of trouble throughout the world is previously planned for a future purification — a crucible God-constructed?’

‘Yes; I can’t help thinking so. You know what Pope says :

“All partial evil is universal good;
Discord, harmony not understood.”’

‘And then, perhaps, it will be more like heaven—the heaven we dream about and cannot, must not, see with mortal eyes,’ sighed Una, longing for sweet peace, and sending her eyes again up to the stars through the open window. For a minute she was silent, and then, turning to her companion, she said : ‘Rol, I have a belief of my own about heaven. I wonder if you will think it absurd.’

‘I never knew you to say or do a thing yet

that I could think absurd. Trust me, Una, and say on.'

'Heaven is in the stars—the stars are heaven.'

He leaned his elbow on the sill and looked earnestly at her as she made this assertion.

'Go on,' he said.

'I believe the stars to be a series of preparatory heavens, not one, but a multitude. We call them other worlds, but what can we know? There are stars whose light has but recently reached the earth, or has yet to come, which must destroy the theory of their creation for the benefit of this world; and as not a tree or stone or flower or bird or insect has been called into being without a purpose, which we may or may not understand, then why those wonderful invisible stars? They never give light to us. I have been wondering to-night at those that do, and somehow they have not been silent—they breathe to me of heaven, of homes of departed souls, and souls as yet unborn. Freed from the body, the spirit soars to a heaven, not *the* heaven, and in some ethereal existence lives a purer life, still impure enough to be far from the throne of God; but, capable of a holier expansion, it may rise from heaven to heaven, perfected to enter the actual

Kingdom of the Creator and meet Him face to face.'

'A probationary establishment,' said Roland quietly.

'Now you are laughing at me, Rol.'

'Not at all, merciful prophetess. Why should I laugh? I know nothing, whereas some angel has touched your perception of the Great Unknown, perhaps, and your soul is permitted to see. If I could believe with you, that the mercy of attempted probation is conceded to the immortal part of us, I think I could be happier when sin worries my conscience.'

'But, Rol, think of the millions of souls carried away since the world began! Where are they, do you think—the good, the bad, and the medium; the men who have died on the gallows and by the axe for their crimes, or the noble creatures who have been tortured for their faith or their principles; or those who have perished in the sea, or simply died in their beds, having led lives neutral, inclined to neither great good nor great evil? Why, those purified by suffering went straight to the Kingdom; others have passed through each ethereal life, slowly but surely, and many—oh, so many!—must be still preparing to reach the

highest haven, the heaven that knows no pain. The people who sin here are not always responsible for their sin. If Napoleon and Alexander, with all their bloodshed and butchery, benefited this world, were they not instruments of a plan? Will a merciful God condemn them utterly? Or is it not more in unison with His love that the souls of His erring children should be led through years, nay, centuries, of purification, and ultimately ascend to His throne? While the world stands I believe strife will prevail, and ambition will ever demand its own tax from all men. Envy, greed, and all the ills of human nature, will continually float about us, even should poverty cease, and the stars look on calmly and wait for the misguided soul born to this planet, more human than Divine, yet to be born again away from the flesh, and enter a purer life in some purer sphere away from this palpitating world. Oh, Rol, I believe it.'

'You think it is belief, Una, because it harmonizes with your own inner yearning. It is an entrancing fancy, but who can say you are wrong or right? When we try to tip-toe and strain ourselves for a peep at the great Hereafter, we are as children crying for the moon. It is for us to do our best here, to be

content with the little we do understand, to remain as pure as we can by resisting temptations.'

'Ah, Rol, it is so easy for such as you and I to talk about resisting temptations. What temptations have we? For us to want is to have.'

'Is it, sweet girl philosopher? No, you are wrong there; every phase of life has or brings its own temptations. Like love, they rule "court, camp, and grove"—are not bred alone by poverty. Have I not been tempted to-day to sneer and revile? Your sympathy is soothing, and I give way to it, and speak of things which, but for the temptation to pour out my wrongs and unlock my lips, should be hidden away. And even with Mid I have been wrong.'

'With Mid—how?'

'I thought her distant and capricious to-night, something totally unlike her usual self; and now I begin to think the poor little girl was not feeling well, and the regret will arise that I was tempted to show my displeasure by studied coolness towards her—and after all she has done for me to-day!'

'She is so fond of you, Rol,' said Una gently. 'It was wrong to be nettled with her.'

‘It was wrong—I confess it ;’ and Rol, reading a certain pain in Una’s face, magnified his offence to Jessie with Una’s reproach searing his conscience, which was peculiarly sensitive.

Under the force of any emotion, he was always impelled to be on the move ; and so, true to this idiosyncrasy, he rose and began to pace the room, with his eyes on the floor.

Una was deeply attached to her girl-friend, Jessie Lockstud, whose affection was so precious, who trusted her so implicitly ; who had told her over and over again of the way she would keep house when she and Roland were married, and how happy they were going to be in trying to make others happy, and how many servants she intended keeping, and ever so much more to the same effect, which made Una ask quietly if Roland had ever declared his love for her or proposed marriage.

To which Jessie had replied naïvely, ‘No, but he will ; actions speak for themselves. When he is his own master he will. At present he submits to his mother’s ruling, and is afraid of her displeasure. He will speak when he is of age.’

‘And suppose, Mid, he never should,’ ques-

tioned Una for reasons of her own, and with a serious face.

‘I can’t suppose anything of the sort,’ said Jessie, with a little toss of her head, ‘when we are so fond of each other, and he is the only one in the whole world who can be dear to me in that way! And I can’t tell what makes you speak as if it were not a decided thing, or as good as decided between him and me, and mamma, too. She quite expects him to be her son-in-law.’

Una had said no more, but continued to listen to her outbursts of confidence without making any unpleasant insinuations, or giving any insight whatever to her own thoughts. She was thinking now of Jessie’s appropriation of Roland, of her wild woman’s love for him, and was so quiet and thoughtful that Roland stopped his marching and stood before her.

‘You are thinking me unkind,’ he said, ‘and are vexed with me.’

‘No, no, Rol; not vexed with you, only sorry for poor little Mid. I fear she must be ailing, and I will go and see her to-morrow as soon as ever I can.’

Accordingly, Una went the next afternoon to Mrs. Calliport’s, and found Jessie curled up and reading on a couch in the dining-room.

She did not bound from the couch as Una expected, or rush at her with a spontaneous flow of nonsense. She merely looked up from her book, and displayed a pale face and eyes suspiciously red about the lids.

‘Oh, Una! is that you? I’m so glad to see you.’

‘You lazy girl! you can’t even get out of your luxurious position for a minute when you are glad to see me. I don’t believe you can be glad.’

Una resorted to badinage; but her clear eyes rested on her friend’s countenance searchingly and tenderly, even with gravity. A faint flush transiently cloaked the pale face, and Jessie put out her hand affectionately.

‘I am glad,’ she affirmed, ‘glad and sorry, too; for I don’t feel quite well, that’s the truth, Una. I’m in a state of limpness, and am sorry that you should find me so.’

Una sat down on the sofa quite near, and laid a hand gently on Jessie’s.

‘What is it? It is not usual for you to be ill, dear. Perhaps you are too cooped up here; a walk could be easily taken when your aunt does not require you. Where is she?’

‘She is asleep upstairs. She told me to take a walk—to go to mamma or you; but I did not

feel inclined. Perhaps I felt lazy, as you found me.'

'Drive the laziness off, Mid. Put on your hat, and we will take a walk together.'

'No ; I'd rather not.'

Jessie nestled closer to her cushion.

'Why not ? You are not too ill to walk, and it would do you good.'

'Please talk about something else, Una, and leave insignificant me alone,' requested Jessie.

'Of whom shall I talk, then ?' began Una, ready to humour, and thinking her friend was really ill. 'Rol ?'

'Yes, if you like. Did you see him last night ?'

Jessie slightly averted her head, and commenced to trifle with the leaves of her book, slowly and meaninglessly.

'Yes, I did see him ; and we had one of our beautiful long talks, Mid, and peace is proclaimed. I know all about it, and how you took his part. You are a little Trojan in spirit ; and he is so thankful to you, and '—here Una quite forgot Jessie's prohibition of the subject of herself—'he is distressed about you—thinks you must have been ill, and said you were not our own bright Mid at all. Now I see he was right. He said I was his doctor. May I not

be yours? Come, Mid, what is it? I fear you are hiding some pain of body or mind?’

‘There is nothing the matter.’

Jessie lowered her head; and leaf after leaf rustled with monotonous regularity, the book sprawling on her lap.

Una took her hand from Jessie’s, and, pained with her unusual reticence, said:

‘I’m sorry to have to say it, Mid, but upon my word I don’t believe you. Has Rol offended you? Have I, unwittingly?’

‘No, no. I asked you to talk of something else, and not me.’ Jessie’s character was too shallow, and Una’s penetration too sure, for this sort of fencing to last long; and Jessie, who was getting frightened at Una’s queries, not knowing where they might land her, thought to hide herself behind an ill-setting disguise of peevishness, and cried out petulantly: ‘I am sick and tired of myself, and if you don’t talk of other things or other people I’ll just run away and leave you, so there!’ Here a page was sharply turned.

This threat did not deter Una from her purpose.

‘Mid,’ she said, as she put an arm round Jessie’s waist, in all tenderness and sympathy, ‘something is out of gear with you. You are

in trouble and won't tell me, the friend you have always trusted. May I not help you? must I not know?' Something fell and glistened on one of the pages. 'Mid!' cried Una solemnly, 'you are positively crying. Oh, trust me, my dear. Let me help you if I can.'

'You can!'

Jessie, fairly overcome, breathed those words in a decided sob.

'How?—how? Tell me like a good girl,' said Una, somewhat alarmed at these strange symptoms of some trouble touching her warm little friend.

'By not—not noticing me,' faltered poor Jessie. 'It will wear away. I can't even tell you, Una, what it is, and that makes it harder to bear. You will understand some day. I am not ill. Don't mind me.'

'And you are not angry with me or Rol, then?'

'Why should I be? How could I be?'

'Well, Mid, let us talk of him, since Miss Jessie Lockstud must, by her own order, be set aside.' Una smiled sadly, and, woman-like, was excited to some curiosity, which lingered in her eyes as they rested on Jessie, but which was banished from her tongue. 'You know in about three months' time he will go up for his B.A. degree, and some few months after that he

will enter his majority. He will not have any bonfires or bunting, or ball or champagne demonstration, or anything of that sort.'

'Yes, I know,' murmured Jessie. Had he not told her so over and over again? 'He doesn't believe in spending so much money for such a purpose ; he calls it profligacy.'

'Yes ; he has quite novel ideas in his head for the outlay of his wealth, and is not going to begin by squandering it on himself, or to feed a crowd of friends who do not want feeding from him, while there are hundreds who do. He is a noble fellow, Mid, and philanthropy overflows in him.'

'He is everything that is good,' acquiesced Jessie, very softly indeed, and again rustling her leaves.

'He has some great scheme for using up several large tracts of purchased land of his father's in Knutsford by settling villages there, if I can understand rightly, and giving employment to hundreds and thousands of people.'

Una's eyes now flashed with pride.

'He did not tell me that,' murmured Jessie.

Here was something, then, that he had confided to Una and not to her. At every step she was beginning to find out how right her aunt had been in opening her eyes.

‘ Did he not ? I think he meant to, Mid.’

This was said consolingly, for Una judged Jessie to be hurt at his seeming want of trust, when he had simply forgotten or deferred to tell her. She could not gauge the depth of her pain, and would not continue, as she had intended, to descant upon Roland’s wild hopes, and the plans and schemes which should exalt his father’s memory and bring needed relief to the deserving poor, for fear that Jessie, being unenlightened through him on the matter nearest to his heart, would be further pained.

She would not tell her of his intention to travel when he came of age, to visit all his possessions in Knutsford, or that Mr. Larry had determined to wait in Phillipia, see him enter his majority, and accompany him to Knutsford.

She glided into other topics, and did her best to cheer her and rouse her to the familiar piquancy, but did not succeed.

‘ Good-bye, Mid,’ she said at parting ; ‘ I shall come again to see you to-morrow, and hope to find you better. Give my love to Mrs. Calliport ; and, Mid, don’t tell Rol that I mentioned that little matter of the establishment of villages in Knutsford. He might be vexed with me for forestalling him. And don’t

tell your aunt, for the same reason. Let him tell you and her himself.'

Una was sorry that she had alluded to it ; but having done so in the belief that Jessie knew as much as she did, she was anxious to extract the sting which she guessed had been unwittingly planted in Jessie's sensitive heart, and was annoyed that she had touched upon the subject at all, and so perhaps betrayed a trust. She sighed for Jessie—poor little Jessie, whose nature, so transparent for Una, sent her thoughts like so many corks to swim all exposed, and to be lightly caught with a quick, loving glance. But Una to-day could only note the troubled stream, and not that which troubled it ; could not see the particular cork of the hour, clogged with complications, acting as a bullet attached, and weighing so painfully.

Jessie could not tell her that Rol might seek a wife out of Phillipia, that she had given up her girlhood's sweet dream, had been aroused from it ; for she firmly believed now that it was really Una he cared for, after all, and that she herself had been a silly blind girl not to have seen it before, and decidedly too confidential in laying bare what should have been concealed from one who had never reciprocated with a

like confidence. But the present attempt at concealment was a positive pain in its novelty ; and as she looked at Una she wondered whether she knew or not if she were so very dear to Roland. She was so calm, so reserved, and had never hinted at any passion disturbing that serenity. She would not tell her what she thought, and as for Rol, why, he would get used to her changed manner and find consolation. Only to keep the secret was so hard for her, and so the loaded cork lay on her breast and sickened her.

CHAPTER VI.

LOCKSTUD PLAYS A LOSING CARD.

PRISCILLA LOCKSTUD, more matronly, more set in figure, of rounder proportions, with silver threads amidst the brown of her hair, with delicate wrinkles, too, across her brow, was otherwise very little different to the Priscilla Lockstud of our opening chapters. She was the same simple-minded, golden-hearted little woman.

Every wrinkle might have told its own tale, especially to those who knew of her home-life and its insufficiency of sympathy and affection.

Maternal joys were as 'balm in Gilead,' but could not compensate entirely for the one thing missing in her wifehood, the tenderness and devotion which every loving wife expects as her due, and craves for when withheld.

Want, in a financial sense, she knew not. Surrounded by luxury and children, she could

boast a home ring of pearls, but a ring from which the centre stone had slipped, and therefore incomplete. She was more satiated with luxuries than otherwise; she would have preferred the 'dinner of herbs' to the 'stalled ox,' and the social life led was simply a sacrifice to her lord's pleasure. Submissive still to his will, she was likewise yielding and indulgent to her children, of whom Jessie was the best beloved.

Probably this ultra-affection for Jessie was owing to her being a counterpart of herself, with a little additional beauty of feature inherited from the paternal stock. In this child she saw herself repeated, not only in form, but in disposition, and watched her budding maturity with some anxiety lest she might prove a repetition, too, in loving to her own misery. But when she observed her growing attachment for Roland Goldwin she allowed no opportunity to pass without some endeavour to strengthen it.

Roland was a noble lad, whom she held up repeatedly to her eldest son Jack as an example. His intimacy at the house gave her ample scope for taking bearings of his character, which gradually unfolded itself to her in all its chivalrous strength and honest purpose.

There was a strong element of romance in her disposition, too, which made her delight in watching the children playing at love within the first decade of their lives, when they knew not its meaning, and Rol—like Enoch Arden, she thought—spoke truth in jest when he called Jessie one day, in her hearing, ‘his little wife,’ with never a rival Philip Ray.

When they were no longer a mere boy or girl her watch never slackened, and every kiss, every smile, every gift, bestowed upon Jessie by him, she construed according to the desire of her own heart, counting all as so many links in the golden chain which should ultimately unite them.

Theo had been angry with her, very angry, when upon one occasion she drew his attention to Roland’s apparent fondness for Jessie, a fondness beyond friendship; but, then, he mostly treated any suggestion of hers with contempt, so she thought no more about it, but felt sure that he would be delighted with such an alliance, if only from a monetary point of view; and, besides, he was really fond of Roland himself, for he had not alone spoken highly of him, but she had often caught his eyes fixed on him, when he thought he was unobserved, and in them she had read actual

tenderness—a pathetic gaze, which had never rested upon any of his children.

This certainty of Roland's intentions towards her eldest daughter served to strengthen the girl's conviction that she was very dear, very necessary to him, which she was to a certain extent; and as there always will be people ready to pry into other people's cupboards or behind doors, and whisper amongst themselves over what they find there, or think they see, it did get bruited abroad that these young people were engaged; that the Lockstuds knew very well what they were about, and kept their arms wound about the millionaire prospective.

Sometimes they were congratulated, and while Lockstud frowned and looked ferocious enough to prevent anybody repeating the congratulation in his presence, his wife did not resent the joy-giving, but mildly said :

‘Well, they are fond of each other, but are little more than boy or girl, so that nothing is settled yet one way or another,’ which certainly implied that busy rumour was not entirely to be despised.

With Jessie it was different again; she would blush to the roots of her hair if one bolder than another ventured to tease her with

insinuations relative to a future marriage with Roland, and try to shift the subject without denying the allegation ; but Roland, who likewise had to stand some occasional reference to it in a little pleasant raillery, only threw back his head and laughed as at a joke, conveying neither affirmation nor negation.

Matters stood thus when Jessie took her turn at her aunt's. But when she came home again Mrs. Lockstud was less exalted, for Jessie went about the house looking wan and white, and with no elastic step as usual to her. Moreover, when she met Roland her manner towards him was constrained, or she avoided him if possible.

Her father, casting furtive glances at her across the table during breakfast, evidently noted her changed appearance, for he set to gnawing his moustache ends, and Mrs. Lockstud knew that this with him was a sign of some inward emotion, arising from various causes ; she thought it pointed to discomfiture at the sight of their daughter's suffering, and that he was not so callous as he forced his children to think. Mrs. Lockstud generally understood her husband's humours, and, pleased with his notice of Jessie, she ventured to say, when the meal was over, and for a moment they were alone :

‘Theo, do you think Jessie looks ill? She is ill, I’m sure, though she never complains.’

‘She has been shut up too long with Aunt Jessie,’ he said shortly, as he studied his tie in a mirror set in its handsome frame against a wall of the dining-room, and stood with his back turned to his wife. But she caught sight of his face in the glass, and could see it was not a pleasant one. She ventured further still :

‘She has been shut up there before, and never looked so.’

‘You had better tell her at once that she looks very bad,’ he said, turning round sharply, ‘and make her think she is ill. Croak over her, and she will. Leave her alone, and she will get better. I say she has been too long shut up,’ with which sweeping assertion Lockstud hurried from the room.

Priscilla said no more ; she knew it would be useless. Over dinner, however, the same day, he surprised his family by addressing Jessie and proposing a little pleasure for her. It was quite an unknown thing for him to interest himself in his children’s diversion.

‘How would you like a dance,’ he asked, ‘after your dull time with Aunt Jessie? I thought it would do you good, so I accepted an invitation for you this afternoon. The

Lannagers are going to have a dance; you'll get a note in the morning, so get your gewgaws ready.'

Jessie did not look over-pleased. The Lannagers were a well-to-do family, occasional visitors to Cecillambda, but not close friends of hers.

Lannager senior was a prosperous solicitor, a shrewd, intelligent, far-seeing man, with an eldest son, who so far promised to be a chip of the block that he had recently passed through a successful examination, and likewise entered the field of law, and was now a partner of his father. As well-to-do men Lockstud entertained a profound respect for Lannager and his son.

'The girls expect you to-morrow afternoon, I think,' he added, seeing that the invitation fell rather as a disappointment than a delight.

'To-morrow afternoon,' echoed Mrs. Lockstud; and then to Jessie: 'Isn't it arranged that Rol and Una are to come here to take you for a walk to-morrow?' She feared Jessie for some reason would not care to remember the appointment, and so reminded her.

'What has Roland to do with it, or Una either? They can come any afternoon,' said Theo with peppery accents and one of his ugly frowns.

‘Will there be many there?’ now asked Jessie, speaking for the first time, but evincing no pleasure in the prospect of a dance, as she might have done but a little while ago.

‘I don’t know,’ he answered, ‘and I don’t know what that has to do with it. It is a long way, rather, so you had better go in the afternoon. I wish you to go, and I will call there for you myself. I shall be detained in the city to-morrow night, so you can depend upon my escort home, and the brougham need not be sent out.’

The fact of Lockstud’s determination to wait upon Jessie himself caused her to change uneasy glances with her mother, for they both knew now that his wish had a concealed purpose, and looked at him curiously, for he was never known to put himself out for anybody dwelling under his own roof.

The Lannagers lived at Lahraloo, a very pretty suburb, some distance from Virginia Bay. Nevertheless, Lockstud, who was detained the following night, as he had stated he would be, took a hansom and went home, *viâ* Lahraloo, submitting amiably to the detour in order to keep his promise to Jessie, and for other reasons as well.

It was quite eleven o’clock when he entered

the Lannager dwelling, and with Mr. Lannager stepped over the velvet-pile carpet of the drawing-room and on to a broad, lengthy, covered-in veranda, where several young couples were whirling in dance, while Jessie sat at a grand piano in the drawing-room, her little hands gliding over the keys to awaken a dreamy waltz. Frank Lannager, the newly-fledged lawyer, was standing by her with an elbow resting on the upper framework of the instrument, with its flap gaping like a gigantic mouth, to pour forth a richer volume of sound. He was looking at her earnestly, and talking in an undertone, as he half reclined, half bent towards her.

Lockstud took in details with a swift survey which was appreciative, as he passed through to the ball-room *pro tem.* and met the lady of the house. Mrs. Lannager was a tall, angular lady with hair rather a dull drab than gray, brushed smoothly back under a stylish little cap, from a brow not over broad or high. She had a peculiar face with a mouth always spread as if to smile, but which seeming smile was a fixture under any and all emotion, having nothing to do with mirth or happiness, while her brows were so extravagantly arched that they perpetually declared surprise where none

existed, though her eyes expressed nothing in particular but ugliness, being of a faded watery gray, and as opaque as the white of an egg. Probably nature was anxious to atone for their deficiency, and so compelled her to manifest an exaggerated exuberance of feeling towards most people coming within her notice, in a lively attention and a rush of emphatic words meant to fascinate—vocables like bubbles, perseveringly blown to burst and leave no trace behind.

Strangers, as a rule, when first introduced to this lady, were discomfited with the idea that they presented to her sight something peculiar in person or manner to occasion on her part a slight ill-bred display of amusement, as portrayed by her brows or lips, but were quick to discover their mistake, since her features never underwent change of any sort, but remained in their fixed declaration of smiling wonder, while her sentiments and actions were so devoted and assiduous that it did occur to many to believe she was overflowing with an excess of amiability and love for her fellow-creatures, and to a few that she was trying to gull them. Invariably she prefaced her remarks with a couple of stereotyped words that affected those addressed unpleasantly, since they meant so little and had lost gloss from constant use.

‘Oh, *how* delightful!’ she began, with Lockstud’s hand within her own, undergoing a fervent pressure. ‘Now this is good of you, Mr. Lockstud, to come upon us this way—so *like* you! See what it is to be young.’ She waved her left hand towards the dancers. ‘Though I have no right to draw comparisons with *you*. You are positively youthful yet. I might easily introduce you to any of the young ladies, not knowing you by repute, as an eligible bachelor.’

‘Not with Miss Lockstud in the room, mother,’ said Lannager senior, who always addressed his wife as his children did. ‘We might palm him off for one if we call him Smith, now’—this facetiously.

‘There isn’t much time for introduction to-night,’ laughed Theo pleasantly enough, and accepting Mrs. Lannager’s flatteries as a shower of withered leaves dropping harmlessly from him to the ground, and lying there to be trampled on as he moved away. ‘I have come on duty bent, to carry off my daughter, and I have a cab waiting; but don’t disturb the dance. Let Jessie finish at the piano; the cab can wait.’

‘Well, you *are* really *delightful*!’ Then, turning to her husband, Mrs. Lannager shook

a much-beringed but lean finger at him, and said, 'Now, Frank, confess; would *you* do as much for one of our girls? Indeed, very few fathers would, so don't look crestfallen; but, then, we know Mr. Lockstud is an exception—such a pleasant, *charming* exception.'

Jessie heard her father's name pronounced thus loudly and vehemently, and knew he had kept his word in appointing himself her escort.

Again, she wondered what could be his reason, and her face, still pale, wore a puzzled look, which puckered her otherwise smooth brow into little wrinkles of thought, and gave her an uneasy expression, for she did not relish the anticipation of a drive home with him, for it may be remembered it has been said that his children were wont to droop in his presence, and avoid a society that was mostly irksome, burdened as it was with his chilliness or marked authority.

She was playing from memory, and practice enabled her to be so far mistress of this piece of music that the dulcet tones seemingly dripped from her finger-tips without any effort of her own.

Frank Lannager was watching her hands and face alternately, and whispering in her ear. He was a slight, well-built young man, well

meaning, and favouring the paternal features, but a long, thin edition of his father, with pale-brown hair and fluffy whiskers, an elongated throat presenting a painfully apparent Adam's apple, like a hen's egg, ever ready to burst through the confining skin.

Jessie scarcely heeded the sense of his words, which were bordering on soft nothings. As her attention was not concentrated on any music set before her, and she yet gave random replies to his murmuring, he was troubled with her *distract* humour, and tried to ferret out a reason for it. As a rule, the young ladies to whom he paid courtesy encouraged him; here he met with something like repulse, and suffered accordingly.

Naturally, the memory of certain rumours arose to account for her want of interest in his especial companionship, a laxity which was more than unpalatable to him because he was so anxious to interest her, because he thought she was the sweetest, the prettiest, the daintiest girl in the whole world for him.

‘Do you know,’ he asked, ‘we invited your friends to-night—Una Pennacove and Roland Goldwin?’

‘No, I did not.’ She heard that aright.

‘Her ears are open now,’ he thought; then

spoke again : ' Yes ; but neither accepted. Miss Pennacove sent an apology ; I forget now what. And Goldwin told me himself he was too hard at work at present to spare time for recreation to any extent. You were not aware of it ?'

' Aware of what ?'

' That he was not coming ?'

' How should I be ? I have not seen him since yesterday.'

' I thought, perhaps, you had.' He paused, and, with a jealous passion stirring, he continued : ' He is certain to pass ; some people have no end of luck.'

' If a will to work and win means luck, he will be lucky.'

Her eyes were cast down upon the keys ; the very mention of Roland's name made her quiver, and her fingers trembled.

' Yes, there's something in that,' he replied. ' I have worked and won.' He was not conscious here of vaunting his own achievements, in his eagerness to court her approbation. ' But,' he went on, ' I doubt if the luck will abide with me. You see, Goldwin will be a millionaire, and a millionaire has more than a strong will at his command. Wealth is might ; it can wield a magic wand sometimes. For

instance, when he wants to marry, as some day he will, of course'—here Jessie blundered over a bar—'he need only to hold out his hand, like a magnet before the needle, and the girl he desires will fly to his arms.'

'You think the millionaire the attraction, and not the man? You don't know him if you say so, and must have a poor opinion of girls in general.'

Jessie lost her apathy, and fired up at the slur on Roland and her own sex. She blundered again over the keys.

'Quicker, please, Miss Lockstud!' called out one of the dancers, who with her partner ceased to whirl with the erratic time, and looked impatiently towards the piano.

'I think you are imposing on good nature,' said Frank, turning from the piano, vexed with himself, thoroughly dissatisfied with his progress in winning Jessie's esteem, almost afraid he had offended her. 'Miss Lockstud must be tired.'

'Tired!' cried Mrs. Lannager, overhearing her son's assertion, and immediately marching up to Jessie; 'now, that is *too* bad.' She took forcible possession of Jessie's small person, and almost lifted her bodily from the piano-stool, so concluding the waltz. 'My dear girl, you

would play, and you are so unselfish. Of course you must be tired. Your charming father is here—so *good* of him to come!—and you must come and have some refreshment before you leave.’

‘I have had some supper, thank you,’ pleaded Jessie, ‘and I would like to get my wraps, and not keep my father waiting.’

‘He does not mind waiting; he is goodness itself, and you are your father’s daughter. Besides, he will have something too.—Come on, Mr. Lockstud, we are going to have a little supper,’ she added, as that gentleman advanced to meet his daughter, and tell her to get ready to start for home.

But not being averse to refresh himself at the desire of his hostess, he bowed politely to her invitation.

Here Mr. Lannager joined them, so the quartette marched to the refreshment-table.

They did not group there, for Mr. Lannager appropriated the bank manager at one corner, and Mrs. Lannager sat down with Jessie at another. The manager glided into political and commercial discussion with an affable confidence, warming over a glass of dry sherry and slice of rich plum-cake; and his daughter, wearied with Mrs. Lannager’s importunities to

eat, had accepted, and was tasting a quivering golden jelly, getting rid of it by small instalments.

‘What do you think of our Frank’s success?’ asked Mrs. Lannager.

‘It must be very pleasant to him, and to you and Mr. Lannager,’ Jessie answered simply, but scarcely knowing what else to say. ‘He must be clever.’

‘Clever! I should think so. His father thinks there is not another like him; but, then, we all love him *so* much, because he is so *delightfully* kind and good.’

Mrs. Lannager’s perpetual smile broadened, and Jessie thought to herself: ‘I wonder how she looks when she gets in a passion? I’m sure she can get into one.’ But she went on slowly depositing her jelly within her lips, and maintained silence. The mother’s eulogy excited no response from her.

‘He will make an excellent husband some day,’ continued the lady of the house, ‘and be able to give his wife a *charming* home, too. A good son makes a good husband, they say.’

‘I am sure I hope he will find his equal in value,’ said Jessie again, but in such a way that her hostess could not detect a grain of irony in it.

Mrs. Lannager talked ‘Frank’ for quite ten

minutes, going into rhapsody, and detailing all family events in which he had figured conspicuously well, until Jessie actually yawned, and felt as if she had swallowed something offensive with her jelly, and needed an emetic. At this juncture her father rose to go, and her release in one way was at hand.

‘Well, mother, how did the pump work?’ asked Mr. Lannager of his spouse later on, when the little party had broken up and they were retiring.

‘Not satisfactorily at all,’ was the reply, denoting that the question was thoroughly understood. ‘She is either shy or stupid, and perhaps there is some truth in that report, though Goldwin’s mother told me herself that his affections were engaged elsewhere, and she ought to know; but perhaps she doesn’t.’

‘Pshaw! why does Lockstud scowl if one even hints at a supposed engagement between the girl and Goldwin? He wouldn’t take the trouble to tell me that he preferred our Frank even to him, as better suited for his daughter. He went into ecstasies over Frank; said he was a fine fellow, and I don’t know what not that was good.’

‘Perhaps he noticed, too, that Frank was smitten with his daughter,’ Mrs. Lannager

observed ; 'for the girls did tell me what a fool he was about her when they spent an evening at Cecillambda a little time back.'

'Well, of course ; wasn't that the reason we invited her to-night, and Goldwin, too, just to watch them together ?'

'Goldwin balked that move, but, any way, I tried it on the best way I could to-night, and I'm not satisfied.'

'You're in a hurry, mother.'

'I'm not blind ; she doesn't care for Frank a bit.'

'She can be made to care for him.'

'She might if Goldwin were not in the way.'

'Make yourself easy : Lockstud for some reason or another is averse to Goldwin ; and, besides, when one man throws out hints to another, as he did to me about his girls never being allowed to depend solely upon their future husbands, about giving them handsome dowries, why, there is something at bottom.'

'And yet I have heard him myself speak glowingly of him, and Mrs. Lockstud scarcely denies that an engagement exists, and, goodness knows, they have been shepherding him for years—ever since he could walk. I can't understand a man of the world like Lockstud not preferring Goldwin for his position. He is

a bit of Oily Gammon, a clever dissembler, and doesn't want mercenary motives imputed to him. She is a good-natured, harmless woman; there's the difference.'

'Well, supposing it is so,' argued Lannager, 'if Frank is sensible enough to fall in love with a dot of a girl having a *dot* to give her due weight, let him try his chances.'

'I intend to, but still think she is either stupid or shy. I could have slapped her face to-night for being one thing or the other, she annoyed me so.'

Mrs. Lannager's smiling lips were compressed, and her opaque eyes sullen, when she reflected on Jessie's apathy or indifference when listening to the singing of her Frank's praises, yet she was determined to secure her for her son.

Jessie and her father drove home in the cab together. After a few moments of perfect silence, he said:

'You are very quiet.'

'I am tired.'

She was weary indeed.

'Too much dancing, I suppose.'

'I did nearly all the playing. I did not care to dance.'

'And the talking?'

‘I don’t think so,’ replied Jessie, thinking that for tongue practice the palm might be awarded to Mrs. Lannager, but not daring to say as much to her father, to whom she feared to offer an opinion, believing she was not allowed to have or encourage one, and wondering why he was so unusually amiable and inclined to converse with her.

‘Well, it struck me you were talkative enough to young Lannager; or was it the other way about?’

The question was mildly put, and suggested approbation.

‘I could not hear half that he said, when I was playing.’

Jessie was getting tired of hearing Frank Lannager’s name. It seemed there was to be a sequel to Mrs. Lannager’s late infliction, and her accents now plainly declared *ennui*.

‘That is a pity,’ said her father less mildly; in fact, with a touch of aggression and sarcasm blended, ‘because he is well worth listening to; know that. I wish your brother Jack promised to be as much a credit to me as young Lannager has proved to his parents. Frank Lannager is a reliable man—a man who will always swim and keep his own head well up, as well as other heads depending upon him. He is

a first-class fellow, and seems to be pretty high-wrought and fascinated.'

'High - wrought and fascinated!' echoed Jessie, with a stolidity so like her mother's that Lockstud, irritated, made an impatient movement.

'Yes,' he said; 'you know the meaning of the words, I presume. A poet would say his heart was throbbing with Cupid's arrow. Jack would say he was "gone." I say just what I have said: he is fascinated with a young lady, who ought to think herself very lucky indeed to attract such a man.'

There was utter silence on Jessie's side.

'In case,' he continued, 'your intellect finds the subject abstruse, I will be more explicit. You are the young lady, and it is my wish that you should encourage his attentions, and root out any silly romance that may be obscuring sound judgment. You understand now.'

Jessie understood well enough, even to his eagerness for her acceptance of the Lannager invitation—his desire to come this night for her, to reconnoitre the Lannager domain and note, if possible, how she accepted Frank's homage.

The little he had witnessed pleased him at the outset, but he was not so satisfied now.

She was not in the habit of questioning her father's will ; it was hers 'not to reason why' ; so she maintained silence still, feeling as if the black cap had been set on her head—accepting a sickening fiat.

'Did you hear what I said ? You are not playing the piano now.'

Taunting was natural to him ; she did not mind it, she was only alive to the fiat, to the cap-pressure, as she meekly, faintly answered :

'Yes.'

At that moment the cab shot by a gas-lamp, the glare of which lit up for a second the faces in the cab, and he turned to her, and saw why she could not speak. He made a second jerk and looked another way. For the rest of the drive all talk seemed suspended, sound being confined to the clatter of the horse's heels, the rumble of the vehicle, or the crack of the whip overhead. Her tears annoyed him. He was not aware of showing any sternness ; he was anxious for her as well as for himself that she should forget Goldwin and turn to another suitor, but he did not want to be unkind.

Habit made him sarcastic and authoritative with his family, yet he was not wholly without affection for his children, or this daughter in particular. He began with an unwonted

cheerfulness to address her, but circumstances altered his temper very soon, for he was not inclined to meet recalcitrant humours in her, which he found existed, though they were not made manifest by outspoken rebellion. There were weighty reasons for his action, but he made an impolitic move on his own behalf. Instead of blockading opposition, as he believed he was doing, he gave it access in another direction, and so it stalked onward slowly and surely towards him as a grim and merciless foe.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL.

LOCKSTUD, painfully energetic in his bulwark-raising against a threatened danger, was not to know that his efforts to repel at the front-door were to be counteracted at the rear—that where he was struggling to erect a rampart his wife was throwing open the back gates and inviting the very thing he feared to sit at their hearth—a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Jessie, sick and weary, and unable to bear this new burden imposed by her father, fell upon her mother's neck, the day after the Lannagers' dance, and poured forth all her bitterness and despair with wild sobs and vows to die or drown herself—all the truth about Roland's real feeling towards her.

Mrs. Lockstud turned white and sick with sudden fear, with indignation at her husband's inexplicable conduct, but would not believe

that Roland's affections were given elsewhere.

He was somewhat surprised to receive, as the day advanced, a telegram from Mrs. Lockstud.

'Come to me as soon as possible—must see you,' it said, and set him wondering.

Immediately after lunch he obeyed her summons, and found her awaiting him in a cosy breakfast parlour. She was so nervous and agitated that he asked :

'Are you in trouble?'

To which question she nodded her head, giving a silent affirmative, as if words were blocked, and next, with a decided gulp and a desperate effort to speak, she began with hesitation, but gradually gained heart and waxed eloquent.

'What can it be?' asked Roland anxiously.

'I have something to say—something which pains me. It is about our dear Jessie.'

'Jessie—is she ill? She has been looking ill lately; but she can't be seriously ill!' he exclaimed, partly assertive, partly interrogative, and with an uneasiness which helped on the anxious mother to speak out her mind.

'Not seriously ill now—not yet; but she will be perhaps if—if what I hoped—if——'

‘Good heaven, go on! What is it you fear?’

‘Oh! how can I say it to you?’ almost moaned Mrs. Lockstud, with eyes averted. ‘And yet I must—must brave a certain delicacy to make you understand me; perhaps her life may depend on it.’ She raised her eyes filled with tears, and looked at him appealingly. ‘Rol, you are honest. I know you so well; you will tell me the truth. You are fond of her, are you not?’

‘Fond of her!’ he echoed. ‘Why, I love our little Mid! You must know that yourself. Who says I am not fond of her?’

He asserted this much in the same way as he would have said, if questioned, ‘I love Jack, or Louisa, or you,’ for he was so fond of Mrs. Lockstud and all her children alike, and the word ‘love’ in this case was used to emphasize merely his strong attachment for Jessie, and as a challenge, perhaps, against professed doubt as implied by her mother’s question; but Mrs. Lockstud did not construe it so, as she grasped at the supposed encouragement of an idea, and cried:

‘She says so; she thinks so. The poor child thinks you don’t care for her as she cares for you; and I know you too well to believe you capable of anything like perfidy or light-

ness of conduct. You have grown to manhood almost under my very eyes ; you are like a dear son of the house. And, Rol, she is a woman now ; it is no more playing at love as when you were children, for she gives you a woman's heart now, filled with that undying love which a true woman can offer but once in her life, and then for ever to the man she hopes to be her husband. And whether it is by word, or action, or look of yours she has read you all wrong I don't know, for she believes your feeling for her to be cooled, to be not what she has confidently expected it to be. This is why she is pining and fretting, why her heart is ready to break, and mine too, I think. Why, marriage with another would kill her !

Mrs. Lockstud ceased, and tried to wipe away her tears with her handkerchief, though they came in relays as fast as she wiped.

‘ Good heaven ! ’ again exclaimed Roland.

It would be simply impossible to portray by pen the visage he presented to Mrs. Lockstud, who could scarcely see through her weeping, during this unexpected, most bewildering outburst. To say it depicted consternation and distress is insufficient.

He experienced some such sensation as that given by a blue-forked, jagged dart of lightning,

transiently blinding as it flashes in one's face and makes the blood tingle and hair stand on end with fear at the passing pain and dazzled eyeballs. His senses reeled for a moment, and then, ruled to steadiness, his mind saw what before had been obscured. His ears caught a smothered sob.

To see a woman's tears was disconcerting always; to cause them was torture. Whether unwittingly or not, it made little difference to his misery; the result was the same. And here was a woman whose every tear fell like molten lead on his heart, and whom he was ready to shield from all things causing pain. He started up from his chair and began to walk up and down the parlour, with his hands deep down in his pockets.

'Don't be angry with her for doubting you,' pleaded Mrs. Lockstud, recovering herself and showing her peculiar ingenuity for misunderstanding. The look on his face was perfectly unintelligible to her, yet she thought she read signs of irritation. 'Don't be angry; be gentle; and as soon as she can see you, convince her how wrong she has been, teach her never to doubt you again; but don't on any account tell, or even hint, that I have been mediator between you. You are annoyed, I can see.'

She looked up at him as he stood still before her.

‘Your distress annoys me,’ he said; ‘it hurts me. I was not prepared; I did not know I could cause so much unhappiness to my dear friends. I have scarcely thought of marriage yet, excepting as something in the distance. I will try and see Jessie soon.’

He had not the least idea what he was going to say when he did see her. His brain was whirling still; but he knew it was necessary for him to say something now of a pacific nature, and he said it.

‘Soon — when?’ asked the over-solicitous mother.

‘I don’t know, I can’t say; but soon.’

And then Roland, unable to speak further, hurried from the room and walked out of the house, omitting the common courtesy of shaking hands or wishing good-afternoon.

He was so much like one of the house, however, that this little breach of manners was considered pardonable, especially under the influence of an emotion that he could not hide, and which made Mrs. Lockstud sigh in soliloquy: ‘I’m sure the dear boy is vexed, but his temper will cool quickly enough, and it will all come right between him and Jessie. I am so glad I

spoke to him, though it was hard to do at the beginning.'

Roland walked with rapid strides towards his own home ; his blood seemed sluggish and his reflective power paralyzed, for he could not reason clearly.

He strode on as if for a wager. A carriage passed him, its occupants talking and laughing. He did not recognise the ladies, although they were acquaintances ; they had nodded affably to him without attracting his notice. His eyes were but mechanical guides to his destination—Goolgun—while his mental sight was only capable of holding in view just then two figures.

He saw Jessie weeping because of disappointment in *him*, and her sad white face rose before him like an apparition. She was a ghost, with a menacing forefinger that seemed to touch his breast with its point as a bayonet, and make him draw his breath with pain. Behind her there stood a second figure ; no ghost, but the outline of the goddess of his day-dreams, his Minerva and Venus combined in one human form—his oracle, his hope, his beacon-light, from whom he had been longing to gather some indication of that passion for himself which he had been told now possessed Jessie, to whom he had meant until to-day to breathe his hope

on the day of his majority. He had been chilly before the poor little ghost, but the presence of the goddess sent fire through his veins, and the perspiration stood on his forehead in great beads.

Arriving at Goolgun, he went straight to his own rooms, consisting of bedroom and study. The latter was a pleasant little sanctum, with its library of useful and standard works, an escritoire, a couple of chairs, reading-lamp, a little ornamentation here and there in the shape of bronze and marble statuary, and a vase or two which Mrs. Dripper kept well supplied with fresh flowers. The floor was tessellated, and at odd places a rug of silky texture, either snowy white or crimson hued, was carelessly thrown. There was a fireplace, not in use at present, but prettily screened, and a mirror above it framed in oak—a mantelpiece draped with some of Jessie's own fancy-work, and one great paned window that lifted from the floor and led to a side balcony.

The sunlight was slanting through its green Venetian blinds, and fell in bars across the tiles that twinkled and blinked with dazzling colour beneath the glint. Here Roland renewed his peripatetic cogitation, walking through the bars of light to and fro, and kicking the rugs rather

viciously out of his path as he tried to calmly study his position.

Strangers had congratulated him, he reasoned ; not alone because of rumour, but because they had been more observant than he perhaps in detecting such signs in Jessie's general bearing towards him as provided sufficient reason for them to base certain conclusions upon appertaining to their future relations—signs to which he had been blind.

If Mrs. Lockstud had not spoken to him in her over-confidence of his more than brotherly affection for her daughter, what would have happened ? Would Middie really have pined herself to death—pined away for him ? He had been ardently longing for such a devotion, but not from that direction. Yet was it for him to ignore at the risk of her misery, or to accept and destroy his own content ? If the latter, what of the goddess ? Would the acceptance affect her ? Were all her smiles and sweetness, her counsel and wisdom, given to him for the sake of friendship alone ?

The time had come for him to speak ; something must be done. Here was a difficulty beyond cornucopia aid. He had not been asked to tilt it with an easy hand and a smiling face into some impoverished lap.

Something stronger, mightier, and sweeter was demanded from him. Was he to give it up—that hope which had lain like a talisman in the core of his heart, which made the world so bright and life a summer's day? If Una should love him, if he had not been worshipping at a mythical shrine, he thought, then God help poor Jessie to throw off her cloud of disappointment, to rise above it, and be prepared to bless another man in the near future—a man compelled to love her, as he was compelled elsewhere to bow down and do homage.

He would tell the tale to his oracle; he would learn soon whether the counsellor herself would suffer should he lean to the side of duty, and speak of Jessie as a future wife. Were there no Una there would be no hesitation; for her sake more than his own he resisted the idea of playing lover to one upon whom he had hitherto looked as a dear sister, and no more. He could do nothing until he had spoken to Una. He thought and thought till his head throbbed, and his two hands pressed it as he stalked to and fro, not knowing how the time sped, until a knock at the door disturbed his meditation.

Opening it, Mrs. Dripper appeared before him.

‘Are you ill, Master Roland?’ she asked, noting the misery in every line of his face, and for the nonce forgetting her message. ‘Are you ill?’

‘Ill?—no,’ he laughed, with an effort. ‘Do you want me?’

‘Miss Pennacove is below, sir. Mrs. Goldwin is out, and she wishes to see you.’

‘Miss Pennacove!’ he exclaimed, with a vehemence that brought a smile to Mrs. Dripper’s thin lips and wrinkled her countenance, and then, without another word, he shot past her like a flash, and went all but flying down the broad staircase to the drawing-room.

‘God bless him!’ cried his foster-mother, as she watched him over the banisters. ‘He is off like a rocket at the mere mention of her name.’

Una’s arrival was scarcely a coincidence at this juncture, for she often went to Goolgun if Roland could not come to Unaville; and, besides, she had been expecting him this afternoon, and his failing to appear accounted for this visit.

‘What is the matter, Rol?’ she asked, when he sat down near her on a crimson plush settee and had just released her hand.

‘What should be the matter?’ he replied with evasion.

The matter? Everything was the matter, he told himself, as he sought her pure face, so chaste, so cultured, so calm, framed in the prettiest of bonnets, with its shrimp ribbons tied daintily beneath her chin; for though Una was approaching a *bas bleu*, she did not scorn personal adornment. To the contrary, she exercised considerable taste, and always wore becoming colours. Roland thought she looked fresher and more charming than ever in her soft cashmere draperies and her delicately gloved hands, in which she held a light lacy sunshade.

‘I don’t know what should be the matter,’ she said, quietly smiling; ‘but you look as if you had had a fright.’

There certainly was a wildness in his aspect; he was unusually pale, and his forehead was still wet with heat.

‘I have been walking very fast,’ he explained. ‘But never mind my looks, Una; let us talk. I am so glad you are here; I wanted to see you.’

He drew out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead with it, and flicked at the framework of the settee, and next at his boots, as she answered:

‘Oh, you are! Well, how am I to reconcile that with having to seek you, when you gave

me to understand you were coming this afternoon for a little recreation over Shelley ?’

‘Something put it entirely out of my head.’

‘The “something” that has frightened you, sir, and of which you are ashamed to speak.’

She was ‘jesting at scars,’ and knew it not. He could not bear it, so put his hand on hers for a second, and said solemnly :

‘It is something that you must know, that I want to tell you, but don’t know how.’ They looked fully at each other for a second, and then he averted his head, and flicked with his handkerchief again anywhere within reach. ‘Una, answer me. Did you know—did she ever tell you—I mean did Jessie—our little Mid, upon whom we have been looking as a mere child all this time—ever tell you her most private thoughts and wishes ? She did confide in you, I know.’

‘And if she did, do you wish me to speak of them ?’

Una spoke the least bit coldly, indicating her surprise that he should even hint at learning their nature from her.

‘No, no ; not exactly that. But if she did, it will be easier for you to understand why I am troubled—why I really have had a fright, and what my position is in regard to her.’

Una’s face was quick now to reflect the pain

that was in his, while the sunshade began to roll and unroll within her hands.

‘Go on,’ she said; ‘tell me everything.’

She half expected to hear what he had to tell, but scarcely to hear it so soon.

‘You know, Una,’ he continued, ‘I have told you almost everything since we have known each other that has touched my own interests. You alone have understood all my hopes and fears; with you I have discussed future plans; from you I have had aid; by you I have been advised. Advise me now. I want your help badly. Listen. A man stands at the junction of two roads; the one leads to a long-desired haven, where a gem shines like a beacon ahead, flashes light across his path, and draws him to itself; the other leads to breakers—perhaps to quicksands; the road is cold and dreary, and only the thought that one to whom he has been a dear friend, and who is a friend to him, may come to grief there makes him turn and hesitate which road to take. Yet he craves for the gem while he would protect the friend.’ He ventured to look at her again; the sunshade was being rolled up neatly, her eyes were grave and fixed upon it, but she said nothing. His heart began to beat wildly. Oh, why could she not guess his meaning?

‘Una,’ he cried, forced to state plain facts, and not to dodge round the point, ‘must I speak plainer? Well, I have been told to-day of something that you have known a long time, most likely—of Jessie’s more than sisterly affection for me. I did not know—I had no idea it could be so; I have done nothing to excite it.’

‘Who told you?’

Una’s face remained perfectly calm; even the sunshade lay passive in her lap. Roland would have preferred an active annoyance or pain, as he replied:

‘Her mother, to-day; she sent for me purposely—thinks Mid and I have quarrelled; is under the impression that her feeling for me is, and always has been, reciprocated, and thought to reconcile us, because Jessie has been ill, and apparently because the real state of the case has been borne home to her, I don’t know how. Jessie has her foot on the quicksands, and——’

He hesitated.

‘I understand now,’ said Una very gently, without any bitterness, any manifestation of rivalry, her eyes clear, limpid, undimmed.

Roland’s heart sank. Then he had judged her wrong; she was only his friend, after all. With a break in his voice, he said:

‘You know I am the man calling for guidance, who craves for the gem, and, while aghast at the quicksand, yet believes it will not be quite ruthless, or destroy its victim utterly.’ His voice changed—it trembled—and once more he wiped the damp hair from his temples. ‘Should I leap to the rescue, will it not be at the peril of another? Not mine—not mine! Oh, Una darling, tell me! We are so young yet. I thought until now that life lay before us like a smiling green level—that we understood each other; and because of that I have only allowed my actions to speak until this hour, when circumstance compels me to bare my heart to you by words. How can I tell Mrs. Lockstud the truth until I speak to you, and learn from your own lips that I may do so? Shall the gem be mine, or—the sacrifice?’

Una, whose profile alone had been seen hitherto, now turned her face full upon Roland, and met his eyes glued on hers, and burning with passionate pleading. She was very pale, yet perfectly calm, and spoke with a quiet dignity—very softly, almost in a whisper.

‘To give yourself to Jessie—to our Middie—is not a sacrifice. She loves you passionately, and love begets love. Don’t say “sacrifice,” Rol. She is so much in earnest about you that

she has considered you her property for years, and certainly will pine from disappointment. She has told me everything—you are right. She is not strong enough to contend against bleak winds, or to save herself from the quick-sands without your help. Save her, Rol, and God will bless you both!’ She rose, and put out her hand; he likewise stood up, but did not, or would not, see her outstretched hand. He set his eyes upon a picture opposite—a painting representing Roderick Dhu and Fitz-James before the combat, with the lines beneath :

‘Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I.’

Her lips began to tremble; her voice quivered ever so slightly. ‘Good-bye, Rol! I must hurry home. I am glad you told me this. Good-bye! Shake hands.’

His hand met hers in silence; he escorted her to the door, and parted from her without a word, because grief had set a vice-like grip on his throat and was choking him. Generally he walked with her to the garden-gates to say a last good-bye; to-day she went alone.

He returned to the settee, and buried his face in his hands.

‘She did not shed a tear,’ he thought. ‘I

have been a fool to think she cared more than as a friend. I have been a poor physiognomist, trying to read her, and unable to spell one thought of Middie's. All wrong—all wrong!

The hope that had nestled so long at his breast, thus rudely shaken, now broke loose from its hold with a wrench that was torture; but its flight decided his future action towards Jessie.

Una walked swiftly towards her home; reaching there, she hurried to her room, locked the door, flung her dainty bonnet from her head, letting it fall unheeded on the carpet, and lastly sank on her knees at the foot of her bed. Like Roland, she let her face fall on her hands, and at length gave vent to the anguish that she had suppressed in his presence.

'Oh, Rol! my love—my darling! What have I done? what have I done? You will never know the truth now. Only God can see into my soul—can see how it has struggled to do the right. He will give me strength to bear it, as He has helped my tongue this hour to proclaim the death-warrant of my heart's desire.'

Now, the fact of a young lady deliberately sending the man who loves her, and whom she loves, from her feet to kneel before another

may savour of the improbable, may point to a striking departure from human nature; but let it be understood and remembered that men, and women, too, before to-day, have sacrificed desire at the altar of duty, and accepted martyrdom to uphold a principle—men and women ranging above the ordinary level of selfish, poor humanity, thinking and acting from that moral altitude which, as the Alpine air for purity, cannot conceive any but noble thoughts, and so touches heroism. Of such was Una Pennacove, the friend and confidante of Jessie Lockstud, who, but an ordinary mortal, had poured out all her soul with its wealth of woman's love and sweet anticipations into her ears, who relied so thoroughly upon her friendship, and had upon one occasion refused to accept a gentle hint that he upon whom she had set her heart might have no thought of marriage with her. What would an acceptance of Roland's wooing mean under those circumstances but treachery to her girl-friend's trust? Was she to go to her and exclaim, 'You have been building castles in the air, for Roland is mine, and I am Roland's. Behold our joy!' or had she done wrong in not saying to him, 'Let us be happy, and let Mid get over her misery or die; we are not to blame if she should perish in the quicksands'?

Rather than debase her womanhood thus, she was ready to widow it for ever—to stifle the yearnings of her own heart. Yet the self-imposed burden was so weighty that it bowed her in suffering, while Roland's expression of dumb pain, graven on her memory, made it harder still to bear, though she tried to soften her misery with a dull hope.

'He is brave,' she told herself, 'and good; he will not be troubled for long, for Mid will comfort him, and he will be happy yet; but I——'

The sentence was only completed with a low wail.

There were two more individuals thrown into consternation through Jessie's love-sickness.

While Roland moaned and Una wept, Isabella Goldwin—by request—was having a private interview with Lockstud at the bank. She was sitting opposite to him straight as a dart, and lily white; he was bent forward with his elbows on his office-table, his hands clasped more in an attitude of despair than prayer, his brows knitted, his face colourless.

'The girl is ill,' he was saying; 'she has been ill some time, and is worse to-day. She cried last night when I spoke to her of young Lannager.'

‘And no wonder!’ came the answer. ‘Could you expect her to do anything else? Why hurry one trouble upon the heels of the other? If you had sent her away to the country to recruit her health, and be off with the old love first before forcing upon her the new, you would have been wise; now,’ Mrs. Goldwin shrugged her shoulders, ‘you have muddled the business. If she has any affection for Roland, it isn’t likely that she can look favourably upon Frank Lannager all at once, and compulsion won’t work. But you are making a mountain out of a molehill. Roland does not return the—the folly, let us say; his thoughts are centred elsewhere.’

‘That may be,’ said Lockstud, gnawing at his moustache and frowning more than ever; ‘but the Fates are perverse. He is quixotic, you know. He will rush into fire at the risk of his own limbs to save a dumb brute; he will do more than that for a woman, especially for Jessie, if he once knows what ideas she has in her head about him, and why she is ailing.’

‘I know he can do stupid things very often.’

‘Your idea of stupidity is singular,’ he answered, drawing himself up a little proudly, and then added, with much earnestness, almost dramatic force: ‘He is noble. I am proud of

him ; I love him. I would like to be worthy to take him in my arms and tell him the whole truth—the miserable truth, if——’

‘ You do well to hang on to the “ if,” ’ she said haughtily and imperiously ; ‘ you *dare* not.’

‘ You are right. I dare not. I fear him.’

‘ Pshaw ! you are a coward in your declining years. I don’t fear him or Jessie, nor am I going to waste time in useless lamentations. I advise you to act.’

‘ You have no love for him ; you can’t feel as I do. He thinks me cold and indifferent, maybe, and God knows I am not. If I am a coward, it is because I seem to be groping in the dark, and don’t know what evils lurk in it.’

‘ Come, enough of this !’ She rose to her feet. ‘ The evils lurk for me as much as for you ; but they shall not alarm me till I meet them, and that may never be.’

‘ How do you propose to keep them at bay ?’

He looked up at her with a strange confidence in her aid, yet noticed that for all her bravado fear looked out from her eyes, and sat upon her lips in whiteness, as she replied :

‘ It is not too late to send her to the country somewhere ; her failing health will supply excellent reasons for the proposal. I will do my part. Roland and Una in the meantime

shall come to an understanding. Then when Jessie, by this means, shall be compelled to make a virtue of necessity, you can bring on your other man if you like, or leave him alone.'

'He holds an excellent position,' reasoned Lockstud; 'in time he would make her forget this trouble. You will help me here, too. When meeting with the Lannagers, you could cry up Jessie, lay some stress on the dowry I intend to give. Not that it will matter much to young Lannager, for he is already attracted; but it might facilitate matters by exciting family influence; and Frank's importunities will be irresistible in the end, and we shall be out of the darkness when once she is promised in marriage.'

'You scarcely deserve my help for trying to frighten me with that little stagy flourish,' she said.

'It was nature that spoke,' he answered, bowing his head; 'think no more of it, and accept my thanks for your suggestions.'

She settled her lace mantle and prepared to leave.

'There is nothing more to be said now,' she remarked, indifferent to his thanks; 'but you can write to me of progress.'

They shook hands, and he held the door open for her to pass out, and thus the interview ended.

There were no amorous glances, no smiles or caresses—that was but a dream ; for Isabella Goldwin had gauged Lockstud's character since she had ceased to be of use to him. But if the love-knot were sundered, there still existed a tie to unite their lives, and which threatened them both, if clumsily fingered, as a mischief-knot to strangle.

Jessie appeared at the dinner-table that night with a little more colour in her cheeks, a sparkle in her eye, and was ready to meet her brother Jack's bantering humour in reference to a fraudulent illness and convenient blind for indolence, etc., with her usual repartee.

Strange to say, Lockstud, who had never been over-anxious or indulgent if his children sickened, was now roused to interest ; and his daughter's merry retort fell musically on his ears, as well as on those of Mrs. Lockstud.

‘ She is getting over it, after all,’ he thought, ‘ and I have been frightened at shadows.’

And Mrs. Lockstud, who had lost no time in making Jessie understand that Roland was deeply hurt because she had doubted him, that he was coming soon, had really confessed his love, and had looked wretched, said, ‘ The darling ! she is happier already.’

CHAPTER VIII.

LARRY SHOWS HIS TEETH AT THE MENTION OF
LOCKSTUD.

ALTHOUGH close work was more imperative with him than ever, as the days of examination drew near, Roland could no more settle down to his studies this Saturday afternoon, when Una had bade him go to Jessie, than dance a hornpipe. Fortunately, the night approaching was not one of the seven in the week marked by his tutor's visit—the tutor still retained to read with him twice a week, and not to act in the general sense of a 'coach,' the driving being scarcely necessary here. Thrown as he was out of his groove by this jolting episode in his life, from which he could scarcely escape without an abrasion—an abrasion not coming within the province of the pharmacologist—he found something comforting in the thought that he would be safe from intrusion.

He spent the rest of the afternoon in his study in hard reflection, but not over books; and when the sun began to decline, he left the house, leaving word with Mrs. Dripper that he intended dining out, that his absence might be accounted for to his mother. Unable to dissemble, he was anxious to avoid her sharp observation, and, worse still, her interrogations.

Mrs. Dripper glanced at him uneasily, but made no comment. 'A lovers' quarrel,' she mentally decided, as she noted that something was wrong with her beloved young master.

Perfectly indifferent as to where he intended to wander, he roamed aimlessly through the streets of Virginia Bay, and found himself in another locality. For him to go to Jessie at once was impossible; as a friend in the old unrestrained freedom, yes; as a suitor—a lover, oh no, not yet, double-faced and double-hearted as he felt such a visit would prove at the present moment. He was too conscientious to go to her feigning a devotion, acting a lie; it was for him to strangle the old passion first—wrestle, slay, and bury, but the wrestling needed strength.

Una had buckled an armour about him, which, in its newness and bad fit, was cumber-

some ; he would weary under it until use made it easy.

He stood hesitatingly at the corner of a lengthy street, beginning with a steep declivity and ending in a level stretch, and leading to the City Park ; and then, with a cigarette between his lips and a cane in his hand, he went on his way, forgetting all about his dinner, and only wanting to think ; for his mental strides were, as a rule, quicker and stronger for a simultaneous locomotion of body.

It was just at that hour when the hum of a Saturday's trade is temporarily suspended before the spring to energetic life, before the busy emporium gapes under the brilliant gaslight of street and shop, and extends its tongue like that of the ant-eater to allure flies, and draw in coin for transit to the commercial maw. The streets were dull, the lamps not yet lit. The shops were empty, and vehicular traffic was lulled, saving for a bus bound to time rumbling between city and outskirts. The quiescence suited his mood admirably, and invited him to continue his walk, which, being rapid, soon brought him to the park steps and into the park, where the loneliness was still more decided, and but for a passing footfall now and again telling of someone hurrying homeward,

and a dark form full length on a bench face downward, announcing the loafer or inebriate, would have been solitude.

Heated with his perambulation, he was glad now to rest and drink in the pure evening breeze as it laved his face and temples, and he lifted his hat to invite it to sport with his hair and cool his heated head.

He felt all the better for his walk; the bodily exercise, while circulating the blood, had invigorated thought and purpose; even Nature began to assert herself and declare a vacuum, the result being a realization of the necessity for food, a vulgar reminder of the animal in him; nevertheless, the twilight deepened, the stars began to faintly twinkle, and the tall trees to loom gloomily under the mantle of night, before he moved on. All footsteps had ceased, even the loafer had slouched off, and darkness fell as he, conscious now of dreariness and the yawning vacuum, arose and sought his club, where he found refreshment for the inner man, and from whence he strode briskly on again in peripatetic reflection.

He entered one of the city's leading streets; it was all alight, the shops displaying their wares under the full force of the gas. The

rush of busy feet and the jostling had started ; the bargaining was lively ; the women with their baskets were gathering edible stores for their coming Sunday's consumption ; while easy-going, indulgent husbands carried sleeping babies in their arms, or a mother bore both child and basket, with a toddling two-year-old holding her skirt in its fist. There was pater-familias doing all the shopping, and pater-familias escaped from the noisy hearth to do his own pleasure and parade with his friends ; and there were dudes, and chatting girls, and Tom, Jack, and Harry, each with a Hebe on his arm, and ragged bare-footed urchins staring at pastrycooks' windows, their noses pressed against the panes, their eyes big with desire, their nostrils tantalized with the new sweet smell of raspberry tarts and jam rolls, so temptingly displayed, ' so near and yet so far.'

Roland was not so lost in his own meditation as to lose sight of this pathetic phase of Saturday night's sight-seeing. Two boys, more hungry and tattered than the rest, unable to tear themselves away from a window, such as described, riveted their eyes there until they watered.

Suddenly something toppled on each boy's nose—something that lightly laid on the frouzy

caps, slipped, and went clinking at their bootless toes. Each stooped and picked up a shilling; they turned round sharply to discover if possible the donor or loser, but could find no trace of either in the moving crowd of men and women and lads and lasses. However, this did not trouble them; for they at once appropriated the money, and gave the pastrycook the benefit of their windfall.

They feasted, but if they sickened Roland was responsible. Anxious to get out of the throng into which he had entered mechanically, not preplanning his route, he threaded his passage as quickly as he could, but in his haste collided with a man pushing on in an opposite direction.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Roland.

‘Thunder!’ was the unexpected response.

‘What, Mr. Larry! who would think of meeting you here?’

‘And who’d ha’ thought to meet you, eh?’ echoed the old man. ‘You didn’t show up at the house to-day; we all expected you.’

Here Mr. Larry took possession of Roland by slipping an arm through his, compelling him to say farewell at once to further privacy.

‘Let us get out of this street. I don’t know how I got into it,’ saying which Roland

turned right-about, to traverse ground just trodden and return to Goolgun.

‘I might as well be in my study as where I am,’ he thought inwardly, resenting Larry’s companionship and heartily desiring to be alone. But Larry, being rather jubilant at the unexpected meeting, had firmly linked himself to his side, and was stepping out with him.

‘Which way is yours?’ Roland asked presently, when his friend made no attempt to quit his hold on the arm, and they had walked some paces in silence.

‘Yours,’ said Larry.

‘I am going home.’

‘Very good, youngster ; so am I.’

‘The walk is a long one ; perhaps we had better ride.’

‘I’m on for a walk if you are. I came in on the ‘bus, and I’ve got enough muscle and sinew yet for a tougher walk than from here to Virginia Bay.’

Roland accepted the inevitable ; so the two men, arm-in-arm, beat their heels together over the flags and under the lamp glare, the white-haired, yellow-skinned, ferret-eyed, stooping old man apparently supported by the stalwart youth he persisted in clinging to, and who was

so abstracted that the absence of his ready merry talk made Larry abruptly ask :

‘What’s up?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean, you’re down in the dumps.’

‘I? Not at all.’

Roland shook his head, and his lip waved upward with an attempt at a smile; but in reality he was not in the most generous humour, and was annoyed at the old man’s too active demonstration of friendship just at this hour, when his mind was somewhat racked and his heart so sore with a trouble which was all his own, for which he was perseveringly constructing a sort of moral coffin, to be borne on his shoulders, and ultimately deposited in its grave. It was absolutely necessary for him to hide the peculiar obsequies and endeavour to appear as usual.

‘You find me in a thoughtful mood, and I can’t talk much when that is on me,’ he added.

‘Look here, youngster,’ answered Larry, not at all satisfied, ‘I don’t want to pry into your secrets, if so be you have any, but when I see Jerry’s boy, that’s pretty lively like most times, forgetting that somebody’s walking alongside of him, and looking mopish, I say, “Something’s up.” Now, what’s up?—out with it.’

‘Nothing.’ This was muttered more than spoken, and Roland felt a wave of hot blood rush over his face, as the compulsory false word mocked at his keen sense of truth.

They had left the blaze of city light behind them, so that this conscience-flag suddenly hoisted failed beneath night-shadows to strike as a signal, but the low-breathed ‘Nothing’ suggested a sulkiness to Larry.

‘I might be your father; if I’m not I feel something like one. You’re not going to blind me; I know something’s wrong,’ continued Larry. ‘I hear lots of things—how you spin your cash for one; and maybe you’re up a tree; if you are, say the word, and Larry’s the chap to fetch you down. I’ve got more than I want, and when you come in for your own (and soon that’ll be) you can pay me back. Out with it now, and I’ll give you a blank cheque to fill in as how you best like it.’

Roland was crestfallen, not at this unlooked for hypothesis, but at the generosity following it, which by contrast with his own churlish humour shone in exaggerated brilliance, and made his heart ache, as the pupil of the eye weakened by darkness shrinks and waters before a sudden glare of light. He shook himself mentally, and tried to make amends for

his neglect by turning a smiling face on his companion, and forcing his usual heartiness to his manner.

‘You are a friend indeed,’ he said, ‘and I shall never forget your kindness. But you must think me a miserable fellow to need help of that sort. I really need nothing. I am only a bit out of sorts, and you will do me a kindness by taking no notice of it.’

‘Well, now, that’s a comfort right off,’ answered Larry. ‘It ain’t quite square for a chap with your income to be over-running the constable; but lads will be lads, and I thought you might be one o’ them sort, and though I’d give you my last penny, still, I’m glad you don’t want it, and young men——’

‘Did you dine at Unaville?’ interrupted Roland, with a thoughtless discourtesy, but anxious to cut short what threatened to be an unnecessary homily on the follies of youth.

‘Yes; they said you had a notion of coming round there this afternoon, you know. I got tired of waiting for a sight of your face, so thought I’d take a stroll, and slap bang I run up agen you just when I want a talk with you! I want to ask you about that pretty creature.’

‘What pretty creature?’ queried Roland.

‘Ah, you rogue!’ chuckled the old man,

drawing his arm from Roland's for a second, in order to dig a couple of fingers in the young man's ribs. 'What pretty creature? Gammon you don't know—do you think I haven't got eyes in my head? What pretty creature? You know well enough. Well, she's a daisy—a pearl—a—a queen—a—— Blessed if I know what she ain't that ain't good and sweet! I never thought that a woman could be such an angel, and so clever, too! Why, she talks like a newspaper and sings like a canary. She's a plum, an' no mistake, and you're a lucky dog. I've knowed a few women in my time, and sly things they could be, ready to hate each other and fool the men. She ain't that sort. What pretty creature?' Another chuckle and another dig.

'You speak of Miss Pennacove?' responded Roland, knowing full well that Larry could mean no other, and wincing at the badinage.

'Ay, that's it, youngster; and I want your advice. I want to give her a tremenjuss whack of a present. Now, what shall it be? I'd like to give her a heap of diamonds. She'd look like a duchess in 'em! What do you think of a what-do-you-call-'em on her head and a chain of 'em round her neck, or a few on her wrists and fingers, eh?'

‘She would prefer books,’ replied Roland shortly.

‘Books!’ Larry scratched his head. He knew so little about books, and, somehow, gems seemed most appropriate for this girl, who had won his esteem, and even affection, in her character of hostess and friend. Gems would respond to the brightness she had shed about him in her uncle’s house, and show her how earnestly he would reciprocate her kindness. ‘What sort of books? She’s got a power o’ them already. I thought to give her diamonds. Do you mean Greek and Latin stuff?’

‘No; but good standard books and works of reference. I know what she wants in books, and can give you a list, and they will please her more than the Koh-i-noor itself.’

‘Bravo! so you shall. You must know more about it than me; that’s why I asked you, you see. Do you think I might throw in a few songs and tunes? I like to hear her sing, but don’t like the tunes; they ain’t her—they belong to the pianner; but, then, she likes ’em, and I ain’t everybody.’

‘I can’t help you so well there, for I know so little about music; but I know somebody who will be willing to help you.’

Roland was thinking of Jessie, but led Larry’s

thoughts in quite a different direction, for he answered quickly :

‘Yes, yes ; I know him too ; but I don’t like going to strangers. He’s always hanging round her pianner. He’s sweet on her ; per’aps he thinks he’ll cut you out ; but he won’t, eh ?’

‘I was not alluding to a man at all ’—Roland spoke somewhat impatiently, for the reference to Charlie Mountfu set his nerves leaping unpleasantly—‘but a young lady—a friend of mine, and Miss Pennacove’s too.’

‘Eh ?’ Larry stopped suddenly, as if an invisible obstacle blocked his path, unhooked his arm from Roland’s again, folded it with the other over his chest, and planted his legs, resembling a miniature Colossus of Rhodes. ‘A young lady is it ? What’s her name ?’ he said, as he stared at his young friend.

‘Miss Lockstud,’ replied Roland, compelled to stand still also

‘Ah ! I thought as much,’ came the answer slowly and deliberately. Then his arms unfolded, and he put out a hand to grip Roland’s shoulder. ‘Look here, my lad ; I don’t want nothing to do with that firm, and I advise you to leave it alone.’

They were far away from the crowd at this

time, and stood partly in shadow thrown by a terrace, which, receding from the street and with its closed blinds, gave no light to them.

‘What firm do you mean?’ asked Roland, now more astonished than irritated, wondering at Larry’s attitude of defiance, his sudden change of voice.

‘Lockstud and Co.—Lockstud and his sons and daughters. I hate the whole kit of ’em!’

‘You don’t know them.’

‘I know him, ain’t that enough? And’—his grip fastened heavily on the shoulder—‘I’ve heard things that I wouldn’t believe, and don’t believe now, because I know who you’ve got in your eye. They say that girl of his is setting her cap at the young millionaire.’

Once more a rush of blood coloured Roland’s face, and shadow befriended him. The whole conversation was to him, in his present condition, as acid on a raw skin, the smarting of which he was trying to bear without sign; but the injustice in this assertion against the woman whom he had determined to marry, and whose love knew no baseness, could not be allowed to pass without vindication, and presented an outlet to vent the steam hitherto suppressed.

‘They say what is false!’ he cried loudly

forgetting he was in the street. 'Such vulgarity as is implied in "setting the cap" does not touch that young lady, and——'

'Sh—sh!' interrupted Larry. 'Your father's blood is up. Sh!'

'We have known each other since we were children,' Roland continued, dropping his voice, but speaking with passionate accents, 'and the whole family are friends of mine—have behaved well to me; and——' He hesitated, then plunged boldly: 'And if I should marry her some day, it will be of my own free will, and no business of anybody's.'

'Marry her!' exclaimed Larry, under his breath, and looking up and down the street as if in fear of being overheard, while his clutch strengthened on Roland. 'Marry her! You don't mean it. You're on for the other one. *You* marry a Lockstud!'

'Why not?'

Larry drew the young man to him with both hands, and whispered in his ear:

'Because there's hell in it!'

His face worked; his eyes burned with rage and hate.

'If you have a hatred against the father, you surely must have a reason. I am not going to plead for him; he may deserve your ill-will;

but why extend it to those who are innocent ? Is it fair to ask how he has so offended you ?'

'Fair enough ; but not fair for me to tell you. He is a double-dyed villain ; I can tell you that. Don't press me to say more. I can't answer for myself.' He paused, and, letting go his hold on the shoulders, passed his arm again through Roland's, and said : 'Come on ; come away from here ; let us walk, but don't talk about marrying *that one*—that's nonsense, that is !'

The walk was continued, and both men were silent for some minutes—both were thinking of Lockstud. Roland could not overcome a certain dislike for him, although he was the head member of the family to which he was endeared, and he was more inclined to blame him than Larry for whatever breach had separated them.

Knowing that Lockstud vilified Larry whenever his name was touched upon, and remembering his mother's wild declaration of animosity against the same individual, he was not slow to believe that Larry had incurred their malice and displeasure over one and the same thing ; but how had he done it ? that was the question. Perhaps both alike had repelled him with their haughtiness, had sneered at his

ungainliness. Whatever it was, he leaned to Larry's side, but, urged to resent his demeanour towards the family generally, he said, after a lengthy pause :

'You may not know that the Lockstuds are my earliest friends ; the sons and daughters are like my own sisters and brothers. I have been reared with them, and when you include them in your anathema against their father, you are unjust, and my friendship for you alone forbids me saying as much as the offence warrants. You must not expect me to stand by quietly and hear you denounce wholesale in this way.'

Larry took this very submissively ; he did not speak for a minute, but his quick step never relaxed, nor his hold on the arm. They were about entering Virginia Bay, and were not far from Unaville when he replied, as if he had been thinking out his answer :

'You are Jerry's own boy. I'm not going to say a word agen you for sticking up for your friends ; but if you knowed him as I do, thunder ! you'd be my way of thinking and hating. And you riled me when you talked of marrying his girl. Of course that can't be. You never meant it ; it was a spar, that's all. You're going to have the Daisy ; and she'll be

rich, I'll take care of that. Washington Larry may be an ignorant old man, but he knows how to be grateful, how to love, and how to hate too ; and when Jerry's boy talks to him about marrying a Lockstud, love makes the hate stronger. Ah ! there she is, hard at it still, I'm blessed !

They had reached Unaville, and had halted at the garden wicket, and Larry's last remark was provoked because music was borne to them from the Unaville drawing-room.

'She can play,' thought Roland. 'She is happy.'

'Coming in, of course ?' said Larry, with a hand on the gate-latch.

'No, not to-night. I must get home now.'

'Very well, as you like,' answered Larry, trying to look into the face of the other and read some confirmation of certain suspicions which began to trouble him. He drew his arm away from Roland's, and detained him a little while longer, holding on to his coat button. 'Don't you be misunderstanding one another, eh ? Is that it ? Look here, youngster, that chap ain't a patch on you, for all his singing ; and she thinks so, too, and don't be thinking'—here his words shook as they escaped him—'of that man as a father-in-law, even if

you've changed your mind about *her*'—he pointed to the house which sheltered Una—
'and don't marry a Lockstud. He ain't a murderer in the eyes of the law ; but, for all that, he broke a good man's life, as sure as there's a God above us ! And I say, Curse him !'

He let go the button, added an abrupt 'good-night,' and shuffled away over the gravel path, leaving Roland staring stupidly after him.

'What is it he knows of Lockstud ?' thought he. 'There's bad blood between them. Mother must know all about it. I'll ask her ; I'll make her tell me. It is a mystery. But should Jessie suffer for this rancour, to humour an old man ? Is it "the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on an edge" ? Am I to set hers aching so ? No, no, my friend ; it must be mine henceforth to shield her from, not to add to, her troubles. I have made up my mind.' He thought of the lines under the picture of Roderick Dhu and Fitz-James, and repeated them :

"Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I."

But at that moment a man's voice floated to him pouring forth in song some grand im-

passioned strain to a flowing accompaniment, beneath Una's hands evidently, and then the air was caught midway by a sweet, clear treble, and two voices blended. The melody, sustained in exquisite time and sweetness by tenor and soprano, vibrated to his heart, and, paradoxically enough, fell in discordant, distorted sounds on his ear.

He thought of Larry's words, 'He won't cut you out,' and smiled bitterly.

'She is able to sing and be happy,' he muttered. 'And that fellow, who hasn't got a second idea in his head, can make her so—that——'

'Stop! And if she is happy,' sneered an inner voice, 'what is that to you? You are jealous—vulgarly jealous. You are made of pretty stuff to make a hero, are you not? You are made of ordinary clay, Roland Goldwin. You should be pleased, not dejected. You are assigned elsewhere. Go and do the work allotted to you.'

In spite of this inward monitor, Roland could not look pleased as he sauntered away to Goolgun.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SAINT VICTORIOUS.

ROLAND walked on to Goolgun with the chiming voices sweeping at his heart-strings ; his heart, like a faulty Æolian harp, not tuned in unison, only gave forth a wail and no melody in response to the wave of music.

‘She is happy,’ he repeated, ‘and I have been all astray. She does not care for me.’

‘That is fine ; I like that,’ said Captain Pennacove as the duet closed and Larry, who had been lingering in the hall till its finish, entered.

Washington had no desire to disturb the singers with his creaking boots, and he wished to let his temper run down and cool, it having been at fever-heat, as it always was at the thought or mention of Theodore Lockstud.

Una rose from the piano ; her face was flushed, her eyes bright—hectic-touched—her

manner electric. She had been playing and singing ever since dinner, rattling off dashing galops and spirited airs until Mountfu had requested the duet, its words just harmonizing with his own sentiments, for it teemed with romance and passionate love.

The sweet rich tenor had warbled out the very soul of the man in stirring pathos. He had never sung so well in his life. The Captain was moved to clap his hands; even Larry nodded his head in approval; but Una, who had not done her best at all in giving force to the expression needed, said, as she left the piano: 'I think it is a stupid song,' with a pettish defiance directed at Mountfu, who looked at her rather reproachfully. 'Mr. Larry, you were sensible not to stay indoors such a glorious night as this.' After which remark she left the room for the veranda.

Had Roland not walked off quite so soon he would have seen her standing there at the rails, her hands clasped over them, her eyes raised to the clouds, but unobservant of the grandeur she had just extolled.

Through the open window her uncle's voice came to her in sportive words:

'That's rather hard on that musical box of

yours, seeing you've been taking it out of it for the last two hours.'

'Ay, it's a fine night,' put in Larry; 'I had a nice little trot, too, and not alone, neither.'

'Hollo! hollo!' roared the Captain, in noisy good-humour, and with a mirthful shaking of body, 'you've been playing gallant, have you? You're a sly cove! Who was the damsel, you Lovelace?'

'Bah!' contemptuously from Larry, inclined to take the joke in earnest. 'A lad it was. It ain't often we run up agen the very thing we want, but I did to-night. Jerry's boy and me ran into each other's arms, that's all.'

'Do you hear that, Una?' called out the Captain. 'And the rascal hasn't been here for two days!'

'It is lovely out here, uncle,' said Una, as if she had not heard his question and remark correctly.

'Mind you don't take cold,' went back the answer, 'going out of this warm room.'

She was quite startled when Mountfu spoke at her ear, having followed her unheard.

'May I find you a wrap or something?'

'No, thank you; but you may do me a favour, if you like.'

‘Sing another stupid song, perhaps?’ Mountfu looked decidedly surly.

‘No; I think we have been selfish, dinning too much music in uncle’s ears. Please reward him for his patience, and give him a game of chess.’

Mountfu was not disposed to play chess. He was nettled. The fact of the duet being called ‘stupid’ had an inference which he was unwilling to accept; moreover, this opinion of a grand conception of words and melody so harmoniously wedded was quite antagonistic to one previously expressed.

‘You are music on fire to-night,’ he had said to her in an undertone during one of those frenzied, fantastic galops which she had produced within the hour.

‘It will burn itself out directly, then,’ she had replied, and it was already burnt out.

He failed to understand these new glimpses of her character just presented: her wild, harum-scarum canter over the keys first, her chilly indifference second. He made no response to her solicitation, but also leaned on the veranda rails, and looked at the clouds, while he pursed his mouth for an attempt at a nonchalant whistle.

‘You will not play, then?’ she asked pre-

sently, after an awkward silence on both sides.

‘Yes, I will,’ he answered ; ‘that is, I might if you will say outright you would rather be alone.’

‘For a little while. I am tired.’ She spoke wearily.

‘Tired, and still standing?’ He was on the alert immediately, and drew a veranda chair towards her, as he said with less frigidity : ‘Perhaps you would prefer sitting down?’

‘Thank you, I would.’ She accepted this attention with her wonted gentleness.

‘Will you answer me a question or two before I do as you wish?’ he asked, bending over the chair-back.

‘Conditionally—if answerable,’ she replied, beginning to harden as he softened again.

‘Then what is the matter with you to-night?’

‘That is unanswerable. I was not aware that anything particular was the matter. You are under a delusion.’

‘Am I? I don’t think so. Why did you call that song “stupid,” when not so long ago you said it was divine?’

‘I alluded to the music, not the words, which struck me to-night as a bad imitation of *Romeo and Juliet*.’

‘I can’t agree with you. Music and words alike are grand to me. Let me tell you why.’

He bent lower.

‘Please don’t; I really am not anxious to know.’

‘You are tired; you are—well, I won’t say what. Good-night.’

Mountfu disappeared.

As he had not held out his hand, she concluded that he had gone inside to propose the game of chess. He did go inside, but passed through the house and made an exit at the side garden-gate, to avoid passing her to reach the front wicket.

They were quite old friends, and she would have considered a breach with him a trouble; but an irritability was always roused in her when he persisted in stepping over friendship to stand on new ground before her. The disposition to do this had been to the fore this night to a more alarming extent than ever, compelling her to take refuge behind a tantalizing barrier of caprice; and as her action of the afternoon with Roland was working its effects, Mountfu unwittingly was making her desperate. She ran to the piano to escape him, and there mounted a sort of musical

Pegasus, which made him think she was music on fire, and say so.

She remained quite an hour on the veranda when he had gone, never heeding time or the silence that reigned in the drawing-room, where, when she returned to it, she found her uncle and Larry quietly reading.

‘Where’s Mr. Mountfu?’ she asked.

‘Mountfu! Lord bless my girl! don’t you know where he is? I thought he was on the veranda talking to you,’ said the Captain, looking up from his paper and over his glasses at his niece.

‘And I thought he was playing chess with you. He must have gone home,’ decided Una, rather gravely.

‘Polite—very,’ grunted the Captain.

‘Oh, he said good-night to me. I suppose he did not like to disturb you in your reading,’ Una now defended.

Larry’s book shifted in his lean hands slightly, and he smiled behind it knowingly.

“‘I smell a rat, I smell a rat!’ as somebody says,’ he mentally cried.

‘I am going to bed, uncle,’ said Una, stooping to kiss the Captain.

‘To bed—so soon?’ he said.

‘I am tired, and have a slight headache,’ she pleaded.

‘Too much pianner,’ interpolated Larry, setting aside his book. His shyness before her had worn off considerably with constant association. It struck him that an hour or so at the piano, with both hands flying to and fro, fingers hopping from key to key, and wrists leaping over each other, was enough to knock over a navvy. How a young lady could get through so much hard work without showing fatigue would have puzzled him. Piano-playing he considered real hard work for the performer, and yet harder work for the listener to sit out. ‘But,’ he reasoned, ‘it is fashionable-like, and if a girl can’t grind out a tune or two she’s nowhere; can’t get a pass into high life, I s’pose.’

This argument induced him to accept his share of the hard work thrust upon him, but her mad cantering this evening had jarred on his nerves, and if he had told the truth to Roland he would have admitted that the ‘tunes’ had driven him from the house and led to their meeting.

Quite naturally he attributed Una’s headache to ‘too much pianner.’

‘Is it so, Una?’ asked her uncle anxiously.

‘Why, I’ve known you to play for hours. What is it, my dear? I thought you were looking so well before. You are white now. What is it?’

He threw down his paper, and, rising, put his strong right arm about her with a woman’s tenderness.

‘Nothing, uncle—nothing to make a fuss about. It is just a slight headache, and will be gone to-morrow.’

‘And it ain’t the pianner?’ from Larry.

‘No, no,’ she laughed, in spite of her suffering. ‘I could play all day. Good-night, Mr. Larry.’

‘Then it’s Mountfu,’ said Larry once more wisely to himself; ‘it’s Mountfu. I’ve seen it coming on, but she won’t tell; he’s been jilted. Go ahead, Jerry’s boy, and win!’ But he only said ‘good-night’ to her in response, and smiled again behind his book.

The Captain was not so easily pacified.

‘It’s queer for her to feel ill; she’s always so bright,’ he said to Larry when Una had gone to her room.

‘She’s all right,’ Larry positively winked. ‘Don’t fret. “Young love would a-wooing go.”’

‘I’m not going to; but I don’t like a finger

of hers, or a quarter of a finger, to ache if I can help it. She is all the world to me, and I'd bargain to take her share of aches on my own shoulders if I could.'

No allusion was made to Larry's latter sentence; his habit of inserting irrelevant quotations in conversation accounted for this, for they were mostly politely ignored as a personal peculiarity would be.

'Well, you'll have to get over that. Folks can't get through the world without their own share of aches—fingers and bodies. She told you she'd be right to-morrow, and so she will. Don't fret,' repeated Larry.

In the meanwhile Una, unaware of Larry's private diagnosis of her case, was in her room and on her knees again, and weeping bitterly, full of self-reproach because all that was earthy in her nature had arisen to a rare mutiny against the fate pursuing her. She had prayed for strength to do the right, and the prayer was not yet fulfilled. Instead of calm there had been tempest; instead of endurance, actual viciousness. If she had snapped half a dozen strings of the piano it would have pleased her.

She had gone through the mimicry of eating dinner with the food choking her, with her uncle's talk, and Larry's few short, dry remarks,

and sometimes medley of sentences, dinning in her brain as mere sounds, with an artificial smile on her lip, and the hectic glow in eyes and face, which made the Captain compliment her on her bonny looks, and Larry follow suit.

It was a relief when dessert was cleared and Mountfu joined them, until he relapsed into that cooing, wooing style of his, which she never would accept in earnestness, but parried with smart repartee and girlish fun. To-night even repartee was denied her; in sheer despair she had rushed to the piano, there to vent her feeling in the delirious clash of music.

When Mountfu asked her to sing with him, she did so, but it was the last straw on the camel's back; her bitterness had reached its climax; she condemned the duet, and rushed out of the drawing-room to breathe freer.

It was this rebellion which tortured her; it was her unusual inability to exercise the mind over matter that stung her self-respect. It did not occur to her that Roland would suffer more than a transient disappointment; she could not be as precious to him as he was to her, and he would surely find consolation in Jessie's pure devotion.

Only she herself would be the sufferer, and

why could she not take up her burden with stronger arms? Why was there a rebel at her heart, drawing swords with the weak saint confronting it?

There was more zeal in this second outburst of anguish, of supplication, less of mechanical force; more soul, less self-condolence.

The rebel began to crouch abashed; the saint arose, weary and white, but victor.

She did not see Roland at all the next day, excepting in church and at a distance; and on the following Monday she received a note through the post. She recognised the writing, and broke the envelope to read as follows:

‘DARLING OLD GIRL,

‘You know I can’t come to you because of your guest, whom I *might* meet and must not speak to. It is the king’s command. How long is he going to stay with you, I wonder? But I want to *talk* to you, oh, so badly!—I ought to say goodly—that *you* must come to me, and let me have my say. Come to dinner. I am not miserable now; I have been a little fool, but that all belongs to what I have to tell you. *Do come!*

‘Your loving

‘MID.’

Una responded to the invitation for the desired talk, but not for dinner.

‘Oh, you have come!’ said Jessie, flinging her arms enthusiastically about her beloved girl confidante, as she stood within the Cecillambda hall. ‘Now let us get away where we can have a fine old chat. You’ll stop to dinner, of course? Come on, and take off your hat.’

All apathy vanished, and the natural flow of spirits no longer dammed by misery, the buoyant Middie led the more staid Una to her own bedroom, chatting the whole way, and scarcely observing at the outset that the brightness was all on one side. With an arm about Una’s waist, she conducted her to the room and then to a couch, and all but pushed her on to it, proceeding immediately to draw off her hat, her fingers busy at the knob of the pin which secured it.

‘No, dear, don’t take it off, and don’t press me to stop. I am in arrears with my studies, and must work,’ explained Una.

‘Then I’m disappointed. I counted upon you spending a whole evening with me—with us; but must be thankful for small mercies,’ said Jessie; and then, noting an unusual drawn look in Una’s face, she added, ‘You are not feeling well, Una, and yet you have come to me. What is the matter?’

'I am quite well, Mid, quite well,' replied Una serenely enough, but decidedly a shade or two paler than hitherto, and lacking that cheeriness which she was wont to reflect upon all coming near her ; 'but it is warm weather now, and one does feel so limp in the summer.'

'You would never do for a Knutsford summer, then,' predicted Jessie, sitting down close to her friend.

'Mr. Larry says it is not half so bad as people think. It is hot, of course, but civilization makes it bearable. People know how to live there now, how to build their houses, and how to dress to suit the climate ; and, then, the winter is grand. But,' added Una, with a nervous twitching of her lips meant honestly to be a smile, 'you did not want me to discuss with you the merits or demerits of Knutsford, did you ?'

'No,' and Jessie, blushing the least bit, cast her eyes down, and began to goffer her handkerchief on a little brown forefinger, 'no ; it's something a great deal more interesting than Knutsford, something that won't quite surprise you, something that has turned sorrow to joy ; the sorrow I couldn't speak about before to you. I can now, and that alone makes me happy. I never had to keep anything from

you before, Una, but this had to be kept back.'

'And now it is all different,' said Una, as calmly as if her heart were not in her throat and palpitating to pain. 'You were thinking all sorts of foolish things about yourself, and—and Rol—is that it?'

'Yes; how did you guess? And about you, too—did you guess that?'

'About me?'

Una's clear eyes expressed alarm as Jessie raised her own and met them.

'Yes, *you*, dear; don't look so distressed; it was through no fault of your own. I was led to believe that all my hopes—all those cherished hopes which you have heard over and over again—were doomed to be blighted; I was led to believe that he loved you.'

'Indeed! By whom?' Una spoke almost in a whisper.

'By his own mother; she did not say so directly to me, but I heard enough to be deceived. And then, again, I was misled by certain things noted afterwards, and then it came to me all at once that it was not right to aspire to his love, that you were the true mate for him. You are clever and beautiful, and just everything that I am not; and I love him

so that I would die for him if I thought it would make him happy. I was willing to give him up—to you ; but I wanted to die, and the hardest part of all was having to lock this secret from you. I was schooling myself to deceive you, to make you think I had suddenly discovered I did not care for him at all—that is, as a husband—and believe I might have done it but for another misery. Papa was trying to force me to accept Frank Lannager. I hate him. You know when papa says, “Do this,” it must be done. It was too much for me ; it made me ill, and mamma so anxious that her anxiety and sympathy forced me to tell her everything, and she did comfort me so, for she would insist that I was all wrong, and, as it turned out, so I was, and she was right ; and, oh, Una, I am so happy ; it is so wonderful—so beautiful—like a lovely dream ! Sometimes I think I shall wake up from it again, and be miserable, with mamma crying over me. He—he said things to me last night never said before. First he asked me why I had been cold and distant, and then said he had been annoyed, but had determined not to quarrel ; and then he kissed me, and said—oh, so solemnly—“Mid, if we have to go through our lives together, let us understand each other

henceforth ; avoid slights, and ever try to make wrong right. Put your hands in mine, and trust me. As there is a God above, so I will try to be worthy of your love for me." I just hid my face on his shoulder, and burst out crying. I was ashamed of myself. I couldn't help it. My heart seemed to fill my whole body, and beat everywhere. I trembled from head to foot, but felt so happy—so happy.'

'And has he spoken to your father or his mother about it?' whispered Una once more, as if afraid to lift her voice, and making no attempt to put an arm about the happy Jessie's neck, or congratulate her, or take her hand, or kiss her in a girlish exuberance of friendly delight.

'No. You see, we are engaged, and we are not—that is, we have been all in all to each other for years. *You* know that. "Engagement" sounds such a cool business word in connection with us ; it suggests an agreement and a lawyer's office, instead of——'

'A rosy Cupid holding out a spiritual bond to be felt, not seen,' interrupted Una, wishing to assist with a comparison.

'Yes, yes, that's more like it,' said Jessie, quite gratefully ; 'that's how it is. After all, we are just in the same position as ever, but

my stupidity upset things for awhile. When he takes his degree and comes of age, he will speak out, not before ; he has said as much. The "engagement " will come in then all right and proper, for he will be his own master. There, dear, that's my news, and it is such a delight to tell you. But'—she put her hand on Una's shoulder with a soft caress—'surely you are not out of patience with me for my blunder about you and him—you have not said one of your kind words yet, or given joy or anything. Wasn't it natural for me, after all, to think he must love you best, when some evidence was thrust before me, and you have always been such friends too, and studying together ? My only fear was that you could not feel for him as I did. You have never opened your heart to me about anybody in that way, and if you cared for him very, very dearly, you would have told me as I told you, wouldn't you, dear ? Well, you did not ; you were and are his stanch friend, as you are mine ; but love is quite another thing, so don't be cool or angry with me, dear. You will mar my lovely dream. I have never for one single moment had a jealous thought of you, or loved you less than I do this minute ; and I pray—oh, I do pray!—that another Roland will come for you.'

Una—who within the last two days was quite a new Una—never quick to display emotion, felt hot tears gush to her eyes, felt sore with compunction for whatever bitter sentiments had been evoked within the half-hour of Jessie's unsophisticated recital of her joy, and suddenly embraced her and wept hysterically, sobbing out broken words :

‘God bless you, Mid, and send you and him all the happiness you deserve! Angry with you? No, no—fifty times no! You are nobler than I. God bless you!’

‘Oh, don't cry so, dear, don't! it pains me so. I never saw you give way before,’ said Jessie, who was not prepared for this rain of tears, and felt a superstitious chill pass through her.

She had heard that it was ominous for a bride-elect to be baptized with joyless tears, and there was no joy in Una's, for Jessie thought she cried from pain at being misunderstood.

‘Don't cry! don't cry!’ she pleaded.

Very soon Una controlled herself, and throwing back her head, said, with a desperate effort to laugh at her weeping :

‘Like you, Mid—I could not help it.’

‘You are not hurt because I fancied you might be, or ought to be, annoyed with me?’ Jessie asked plaintively.

‘No, dear, no ; I can be hurt at nothing you do or say. Did you think I could listen to your pretty story unmoved, or to your generous words?’

Una swept her handkerchief across her eyes, impatient with herself still for want of a powerful curb on nerve and emotion.

‘Now I feel better,’ she said, with a determination to appear thoroughly at ease. ‘One must be pardoned for “giving way” sometimes ; and I believe this weather tries me. I will take a little walk now, and come again some other day.’

‘I never heard you complain of being tired through the weather. Let me order you a cup of coffee ; it might revive you.’

‘I would rather have the walk, my dear Mid, and think over this pleasant news.’

Una rose.

‘One moment.’ Jessie half pulled her back to the couch. ‘Answer me, Una : have you never been in love?’

‘I am wedded to the University—to my books at present, and shall be to a profession by-and-by,’ was the answer, the equivocation of which escaped simple Jessie, who looked archly at Una, and interrogated again :

‘And you don’t care the least bit for Charlie Mountfu—not like I do for Roland?’

‘Yes, I do care for him,’ replied Una, ‘but not as you do for Rol. Are you satisfied?’

‘Yes. I knew you would tell me the truth. I knew I was right in thinking you did not care for him so, and told Rol as much.’

‘Then, you and he have been discussing the subject?’ Una’s eyes declared gentle rebuke. ‘Now that you have settled your own affairs, you want to take up somebody else’s.’

‘No,’ explained Jessie, ‘don’t think that; but he thought you favoured his society a great deal.’

‘He is right,’ Una asserted with desperate decisiveness; ‘I do. I love music, and so does Charlie; that is the bond between us.’ She rose a second time. ‘Let me get out in the air, Mid; and good-bye.’

Out in the street and alone, she inwardly cried: ‘Who knows the whole—the real truth but me? Only One—only One, and He will support me.’

Pondering over Jessie’s “pleasant news,” she went her way, and was quite unwarned of the approach of a barouche, which dashed up to the curb and there halted.

‘Miss Pennacove—Miss Pennacove!’

Mrs. Goldwin was leaning towards her from the barouche. Una went up to her.

‘Are you in the clouds, or doing a problem?’ queried Mrs. Goldwin.

‘Doing the problem,’ answered Una, without a smile.

‘Where are you going?’

‘For a walk.’

‘Come for a drive instead. You are looking moped, and I want company, but am going to pay a duty call first on the Lannagers—it is their day “at home.”’

Una debated the matter in her own mind. She and Mrs. Goldwin were not congenial souls, but polite acquaintances; and she did not wish to be ungracious in receiving this spurt of attention from her. Moreover, she felt rather glad than otherwise to find diversion of thought.

‘I will go with you. I owe them a call too,’ she said.

‘That’s right; jump in,’ said the lady of the barouche, more affable than ever; and then to the coachman, as Una took her place by her side: ‘To Lahraloo.’

They rolled away to Lahraloo.

CHAPTER X.

SCATTERING SEED ON BARREN GROUND.

AMIDST a hum of voices and the gentle clink of china, Mrs. Goldwin and Una were ushered into the long Lannager drawing-room, where Mrs. Lannager was already in full tongue tilt, with the Misses Lannager as allies, engaged with guests.

The Misses Lannager were apples of the Lannager tree, but of an improved quality to the original crop—rosier, rounder, and sounder at the core.

The perpetual smile and elevated brows were happily not repeated in either of these young ladies, yet the tendency to tinsel their utterances, as their mother did hers, with the idea of pleasing, as a nurse shakes a rattle in a baby's face, was fully inherited, but modified; for where Mrs. Lannager smiled and smirked and gushed to excite approbation of herself, her

daughters fawned and flattered more often than not to put their friends in an excellent temper with themselves ; and it is remarkable how easily most people swallow these sugar-coated words, and what an immediate effect of self-complacence arises therefrom to send a glow of personal pride through their receptive veins.

As Mrs. Goldwin and Una entered the hum ceased, but the clatter went on, for a foot-boy was gathering empty cups and plates—the débris of the orthodox four o'clock onslaught—and a maid, smartly capped, was handing around fresh cups of tea and relays of cake or wafer slices of bread-and-butter.

Mrs. Lannager advanced half-way to meet the new-comers, all smiles, ecstasy and fuss ; and the youngest Miss Lannager, with a fervent osculatory salute to Una, caught her by the hand, and drew her to a chair as soon as greetings were exchanged all round, leaving Mrs. Goldwin to her mother's charge. The eldest Miss Lannager, stationed at a small table behind a silver tea-urn, which discharged its contents into dainty pink porcelain thimble-shaped cups beneath her manipulation, was content to rise and pay homage quietly, the tea-urn demanding most of her attention.

'I am *so* glad to see you, dear,' said the

youngest Miss Lannager to Una. 'It is an age since we met.'

'Last week in the gardens, I believe,' Una reminded her, with a quiet smile. 'You would make a moment a century, unlike the scientist, who says time is a moment.'

'Now, that is *so* like you—you do say such *clever* things; but, you know, a moment *is* an age when we are waiting and longing, and it is such a long time since you came to see us. You are so devoted to your studies. I suppose, perhaps, you work too hard; perhaps you have not been well. Have you not been well?'

Miss Lannager's pleasant brown eyes were not slow to observe that Una was not looking so well as usual.

'I am quite well, thank you; I am never ill,' was the reply, given confidently enough, and yet with a little flushing at the question.

'Not that you look ill,' was the quick rejoinder, intended to correct any unpleasant inference likely to be drawn; 'but you are always so bright. My sister and I sometimes envy you.'

'Which means I lack brightness to-day. Well, the loss has its compensation for me. It must be an advantageous disadvantage which spares me your envy.' The flush died out and left her wan, as she added: 'I believe the

weather makes me droop, and it is quite summerish to-day.'

'You don't like hot weather, then? I prefer it—if not *too* bad—to chapped lips, red noses, and chilblained fingers.'

'Miss Pennacove, do you take sugar and cream in your tea?' came a voice from behind the tea-urn.

Miss Pennacove did take sugar and cream.

On the other side of the room a white-haired, stumpy, jolly-looking old gentleman, present with his wife, was talking to Mrs. Goldwin.

'That's an awfully pretty girl,' he remarked, while his wife was sipping her tea and quietly estimating the cost of the china, so *chic*.

'Of whom are you speaking?' asked Mrs. Goldwin.

'Miss Pennacove, to be sure.'

Mrs. Goldwin raised her lids languidly, and looked towards Una.

'Do you think so? She is too stern sometimes for prettiness. She looks so to-day, or perhaps she assumes the sternness as most becoming to a *bas-bleu*. You know she is one—an execrable *bas-bleu*.'

'Execrable! That's rather harsh, isn't it?'

'Not in my opinion. I am not partial to blue-stockings.'

‘Ah, my dear lady, there are blue-stockings *and* blue-stockings. “Save me from a Mrs. Jellaby,” I cry. One time I had an antipathy to the *bas-bleu* order of creatures, but I’ve lived long enough to see my error. A *good* woman learned is more reliable than a good woman simple; a good woman learned will make a better wife and mother than the good woman unlearned, and therefore ought not to be called “execrable.” A woman, for instance, who knows thoroughly the laws of chemistry will make a better cook than the woman who knows nothing whatever about it, whose culinary craft is nothing but a poor imitation of the craft of other silly cooks who unwittingly turn meat into poison. A female domestic economist will be perfected, if a political economist. Give me that sort of *bas-bleu*, and I’ll honour her; but when she has a Psyche face and glorious eyes, why, I’m ready to worship her. Don’t say “execrable.”’

His eyes twinkled with merriment and satisfaction as they turned again on Una, and Mrs. Goldwin vented one of her forced hard laughs.

Everybody turned towards her and expressed amusement and lurking curiosity.

‘Now, Mrs. Goldwin,’ cried a young clergyman, a Mr. Jilk, who was supposed to be

attracted by one of the young ladies of the house, 'she is the happiest who shares her happiness. May we not laugh too?'

'Oh, certainly,' was the response.

The champion of blue-stockings glanced at his wife, and coughed.

Mrs. Lannager and daughters, with the rest of the company, turned smiling and expectant faces to Mrs. Goldwin; Una alone was uninterested, and with eyes cast down on a photograph album, with which she was amusing herself, went on turning over its leaves and inspecting the photos.

'Mr. Bagwag,' spoke up Mrs. Goldwin, with a little mischievous delight in repeating the fat old gentleman's sentiments in her own way, 'has been expounding some peculiar ideas. There is to be a new form of advertisement organized for any lady wanting a *chef*—simply: "Wanted, a blue-stockings as head cook; noother needapply."'

The attendants, male and female, supposed not to have sense for aught in that room but their duties, glided about automaton-like and stolid in feature, but tittered comfortably as soon as they were outside.

'Pardon me,' said Bagwag, politely bowing to Mrs. Goldwin and the company. 'That is an ingenious twist of our friend's. I merely

wished to prove that a woman with cultured brains, as well as a noble nature, might dignify and elevate the position of cook. Our longevity depends more upon the cook than ourselves. She holds our liver in her hand very often, and our life is on her head.'

'And if she is pretty?' interpolated Mrs. Goldwin.

'She is a divinity,' asserted Bagwag.

At which everybody but Una laughed; she was still busy with the albums, until an æsthetic young lady sat down by her side and said:

'You are fond of studying portraits, Miss Pennacove?'

'I beg your pardon.'

Una looked up abstractedly.

'I asked if you were fond of studying portraits. I am, and that led to my question. Seeing you so absorbed, I thought you must be.'

'Yes, I'm fond of it sometimes, when I know the people represented.'

'Oh, I am, even if I don't know the people! I know something of physiognomy.'

'Can you judge faces by photos, then?'

'Well not *always*; but very often, I think. Lavater confesses to have made mistakes occasionally, and of course, you know, he was a real physiognomist.'

Una smiled, and said :

‘ If the master, then, after giving to the world a volume of facts and theories, admits that his decision is not always reliable, what shall be said of his pupils ?’

‘ That they may be an improvement on the master, perhaps,’ said this Lavater disciple with decided hauteur, ready to resent what she believed to be an implied contempt of her own ability to interpret features.

‘ And still fail to arrive at correct conclusions. I believe in phrenology to a very great extent, but physiognomy must be often misleading.’

‘ You have not studied it.’

‘ No ; but I think face-reading is an inborn sense with us, just as we know by touch what is soft, what is harsh. There are faces that attract, and, again, that repel ; and this is exemplified even in babies, who, without reason for a guide, will shrink from some and leap to others. They seem to know their genuine admirers, who is inclined to be gentle and kind, or the reverse. Everybody is a physiognomist, more or less, according to the impression the face makes ; and I don’t think the study of physiognomy is an invaluable assistance in judging correctly, nor do I think it quite fair to judge faces by all photos, which,

after all, bear a set expression, and where outlines are modified by art.'

'Ah! you want to make me dissatisfied with my pet study, Miss Pennacove; but you won't. If I chose, I could tell you everybody's character in this room.'

'Tell me mine, then,' said Una, 'and I promise I'll not take offence at truths—bitte truths.'

'Supposing I say that there are no *bitter* truths in your case?' asked the æsthetic young lady.

At this Una smiled again.

'Out of your own mouth you have confirmed my opinion. Who is there living whose character, read aright, would fail to show some "bitter truths"?'

The physiognomist bit her lip and tossed her head; she was a little puzzled over Una's face, and, to be safe in substantiating her own opinion of the science she extolled, she, guided more by manner than countenance, said shortly:

'Well, if you must know, you are obstinate, self-willed, and you will make enemies.'

And with this the young lady rose and hurried away, as if she had had enough of the discussion. Shaking out her olive-tinted, scanty skirt, she glided from Una to talk to somebody else.

‘Has anybody read last Saturday’s *Wheel of the Press*?’ asked Mrs. Lannager, ‘and the “social” column all about Mrs. Perkins’ ball?’

Everybody but Una and the two gentlemen knew all about the ball and the ‘social’ column too.

‘It must have been on a grand scale,’ said one.

‘Oh, it was perfectly lovely!’ said a plump little personage nearly out of her teens, who had figured as one of the guests, and whose dress had been praised.

‘Trash!’ muttered Mr. Jilk, who had made his way to Miss Pennacove’s side. ‘What do you think of the “social” records?’ he asked her.

‘Very interesting to those whose dresses have been lauded, I suppose. If they avoided details, and were satisfied with a passing allusion, they might be admissible. As it is, I would expunge them.’

‘Just my opinion—just my opinion.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed the young lady whose costume had met with honourable mention, and who had partly overheard Una’s comment. ‘What do you think Miss Pennacove says? She would expunge the “social.”’

Una looked annoyed. She had given a private opinion, as desired, and here it was hurled at everybody's head, with an ill-bred vehemence, by one who was almost a stranger to her.

'So they ought,' spoke up Mr. Jilk.

'So they ought not,' chorused the ladies.

'I never meant that exactly,' said Una; 'but a report of festivities can be made readable and interesting, I fancy, without detailing points of dress or making invidious distinctions; otherwise it is pernicious. People who can't afford to dress magnificently do their best to ape those who can, for the gratification of seeing their names printed and dress described. Fathers, husbands and brothers, too, I dare say, know what it entails—this extravagant competing.'

'They have no right to compete if they can't afford it,' asserted Mrs. Goldwin rather contemptuously.

'Cripples are not expected to fight,' said Mr Bagway jocosely.

'That is true,' said Mr. Jilk; 'for they might get hurt. Miss Pennacove is quite right. It is only within the last ten years that we have been mimicking the *Morning Post* of the fashionable English world, where people are entitled

to be extravagant without stinting the larder. With us it is different, with a handful or so of wealthy families and a majority of strugglers. An undue extravagance must be fostered in the minds of our girls, and must make the outlay far from commensurate with their position, if only to secure their eulogy in the public papers. What a noble ambition to foster! I rise to second Miss Pennacove.'

'Oh!' simpered the plump young lady. 'What should we do without "our social"?''

'The *Wheel of the Press* wouldn't go round,' said Mr. Bagwag, inclining to irony.

'The pie would lose its best ingredient,' quoth Mrs. Goldwin.

'Tastes differ, fortunately,' argued Mr. Jilk. 'The right of that ingredient to be called "best" is to be questioned.'

Una nodded her head approvingly, and maintained that it was a stimulant to excite an undue love of display.

'It is such absurdities that make dress the be-all and end-all of some women's lives,' she said.

The rest of the ladies were opposed, and tried to frown her down, and all began to offer opinions simultaneously.

One said, if everybody thought like Miss

Pennacove, women might be Quakers, and she did not see why a woman should not do her best to look well ; and to dress becomingly was not always a question of means. Another vowed that Miss Pennacove would ruin trade ; that but for fashion miserly folks would never spend a penny more than necessary.

‘You are quite mistaken,’ answered Una, half regretting the prominence of the discussion. ‘It is part of a woman’s duty to try to look her best. My argument is *not* that we should despise dress, but that we should not make it a kind of fetich.’

Here Frank Lannager, returned from his office, entered the room, and Mrs. Lannager, evidently following some train of thought, piloted colloquy into another channel by asking generally how it was that the Lockstuds were not at Perkings’ ball ?

‘Some gentlemen I know were quite disappointed,’ she said archly, and smiling with painfully stretched lips. ‘Does anybody know ?’

‘Miss Lockstud need not have feared that her dress would be overlooked, I’m sure,’ said her daughters.

‘Jessie was not well enough,’ Una announced.

‘Not well!’ exclaimed Mrs. Lannager. ‘Miss Lockstud not well! What is the matter?’

‘Oh! what is the matter?’ echoed her daughters.

They expressed such evident distress that Una was quick to relieve them by saying:

‘She is perfectly well now. I only saw her an hour ago, and never saw her looking better.’

Una, only looking at Mrs. Lannager, only listening to her over-coloured reception of this information, trying to believe her sincere, did not see how it affected Mrs. Goldwin.

‘He has left off worrying her, as I advised,’ she said to herself, thinking of her late interview with Jessie’s father; and then aloud to her hostess: ‘She would have been the belle had she gone. She’s a sweet little thing; don’t you think so?’

Mrs. Lannager drew her chair closer to Mrs. Goldwin, and lowered her voice:

‘Well, yes, she is. Now, tell me the truth. I’ll not mention it to a soul. Is there really anything between her and your son? You know people will talk.’

‘And people will believe, I suppose. Absurd to think of such a thing! He is a mere boy

yet, and when he does look out for a wife, it won't be in that direction.' Mrs. Goldwin spoke confidently, and in such a tone that Mrs. Lannager understood at once the alliance would be far from satisfactory. 'It would be a money match on both sides, and that spoils the romance. Of course you know that Lockstud will dower his daughters well. He is able to do it, and is not close-fisted. And, then, you know, too, that there is a rich old aunt in the background, and Jessie is her favourite.'

'Yes, she ought to weigh well, as they say.'

'There's no doubt of that,' said Mrs. Goldwin, who, having affirmed this much, thought it time to take her departure.

When she and Una were in the barouche again, she threw herself back wearily for a second, and then suddenly brightened with an effort, as if just recollecting she was not alone.

'Where would you like to drive?' she asked.

'Anywhere,' answered Una; 'just as you please.'

'Wicknar Road,' said Mrs. Goldwin shortly to the coachman.

Wicknar Road was one of the prettiest drives

in Phillipia; Wicknar itself, a large suburb, presenting rural and palatial homes and picturesque aspects.

Mrs. Goldwin seemed to be desperately voluble; she pointed out this and that place as they shot by park and field, mansions and gardens, terrace and church, and made running comments, to which Una scarcely listened. Mrs. Goldwin had never paid her so much attention before, and instead of heeding the sense of her remarks, she was endeavouring to discover the meaning of her novel demeanour towards her—to understand Roland's mother. She succeeded in neither.

When they had been driving about half an hour Mrs. Goldwin abruptly changed her theme:

'That is a very promising young man,' she remarked, as if continuing a subject.

'Mr. Jilk, do you mean?' Una glanced at her inquiringly.

'No—no!' sharply. 'I allude to young Lannager. I am sure he is a real good fellow—a gentleman.'

'He is a fair specimen,' was the response, rather lukewarm and neutral.

'You don't know him well enough to judge. If I were a girl, I'd fall in love with him, and the girl he honours with his love should con-

sider herself particularly favoured. Jessie Lockstud should.'

Mrs. Goldwin said this very rapidly, and fixed her penetrating eyes full on her companion.

'Jessie!' exclaimed Una, startled out of apathy.

'Yes. You have had no opportunity of seeing, perhaps, as others have, or you have been less observant. Why, he is madly in love with her!'

'Is he? I am sorry for him,' Una said very quietly.

'Why sorry, may I ask?'

'Because Jessie is not madly in love with him.'

Una was staring at the coachman's back.

'Ah! she confides in you, then.'

Mrs. Goldwin, still intent on the clear-cut profile, drew a long breath one minute, and laughed the next—one of her counterfeits of mirth—a distorted sound like that of the clapper swinging within a cracked bell; it fell gratingly on Una's ears. There are so many kinds of laughter that it is difficult to define each. There is the hearty, jovial, genuine laugh—a joyful exuberance of spirit that vibrates from heart to heart—bound to find an echo; there is

the meaningless laugh—‘the crackling of thorns under a pot’; the scornful laugh, which sets the teeth on an edge; the egotistical laugh, not unlike a donkey’s bray; and ever so many more; but the worst laugh of all is the cruel, cynical laugh which might be called the voice of a sneer, and it was such as this last that escaped Mrs. Goldwin now.

‘My dear girl,’ she said, ‘your innocence amuses me. Don’t you know that a mad love on both sides is not absolutely necessary to perfect a betrothal as long as the balance brings down the scale on the masculine side? A man is an idiot if, when he is fond of a girl, he can’t succeed in wooing and wedding her. A little wise adulation, plenty of patience with her coyness or caprice, constant attendance, presents, deference to her wishes and opinions, unlimited promises of future happiness—that is the recipe, and Frank Lannager is not an idiot.’

‘He will be if he persists in forcing his attentions where they are certain to be repulsed. Your recipe won’t answer in Jessie’s case.’

Una spoke out plainly.

Mrs. Goldwin did not laugh at this.

‘You are inclined to favour her determination to repel,’ she said. The dialogue, carried

on in an undertone, was falling to a whisper. 'You are unwise ; although you are her friend and confidante, you don't know her as well as I do. She has that pretty little head of hers stuffed with romantic nonsense, the result of "yellow - backs." You young people never will be practical and won't listen to older and wiser ones. If you have her interest at heart, you will use your influence over her to eradicate this romance. I need not mince matters with you. She thinks she is in love with somebody else—she only thinks so ; she is mistaken, and you would be conferring a lasting benefit if you would go to her and tell her so, because'—she hesitated, and then, sinking her voice lower still and glancing uneasily at the coachman, she said right in Una's ear—'she can never be anything more to my son than what she is already.'

Una started and coloured.

'What can you mean ?' she asked.

'Just what I say—no more, no less. Depend upon it, when the scale of love comes down too heavily on the woman's side, it is a mistake ; the marriage is a mistake.'

Una made no reply. What could she say ? She was hot and cold, red and white ; she lay well back against the cushions, and was full of

perplexity. She could not breathe the fact of the secret betrothal, nor could she promise to make Jessie look favourably upon Frank Lannager, or believe she was not in love with Roland. Her face was as a barometer to Mrs. Goldwin, pointing to a disturbed atmosphere. After a pause Roland's mother said :

‘ You have nothing to say to that.’

‘ What do you wish me to say ? I don't know how to answer you.’

Una looked straight before her still.

‘ Say that you will help me.’

‘ Help you !’ exclaimed Una, with emphasis on the pronoun.

Mrs. Goldwin looked annoyed, whether with Una or herself it is hard to judge.

‘ I mean, help me to befriend Jessie,’ she explained ; ‘ I have known her since she was a baby, and I am speaking for her sake ; I wish her to benefit by the experience of others. She doesn't care for me as she does for you ; for me to attempt to advise her would be a waste of words and breath. One word from you will have more effect than fifty from me. Now *comprenez-vous ?*’

Her sentences followed each other as glibly as if they had been rehearsed—perhaps they had—and mystified Una, who answered :

'I am afraid I don't understand. Why should she never be anything but what she is? You bewilder me.'

Mrs. Goldwin could have stamped her foot—could have screamed at this tiresome girl who was not to be won over. Had she been in her own room she would not have held so tight a curb on her passion. The forced suppression drove the blood from her lips, and looked out of her eyes in rage.

'Haven't I told you?' she muttered behind her teeth. 'He doesn't care for her, that's why. You are not so dense; you need not look so far away for an example of my theory. You know Theodore Lockstud never cared for his wife as his wife cared for him. Are they happy? You and I, having been behind the scenes, can answer this question, if strangers can't. Are they happy?'

Una could not reply in the affirmative to this. But she also knew that old Mr. Goldwin had worshipped his wife, and having learned much of the conjugal relations of Mr. and Mrs. Goldwin, she made use of this knowledge in her desire to strengthen Jessie's cause, and said:

'There may be some truth in that, but by the same theory yours must have been a most

felicitous marriage, for I know your husband idolized you, even if you did not idolize him.'

A sharp, malicious glance was directed at her, but not observed, for Una did not dare to look at Mrs. Goldwin, for fear of betraying the pain which she could not conceal ; she was looking in quite an opposite direction, as if interested in the street.

'Of course I was very happy : who says I was not? What has your uncle been telling you?' asked Mrs. Goldwin quickly.

'Let us talk of something else, please,' urged Una, who, having been tempted to fire a shot, was now wishing it recalled.

But Mrs. Goldwin was not desirous of changing the subject.

'No ; I have not done with this yet,' she said, still below her breath. 'You have not answered my question. I will not enforce it ; your unwillingness to reply is an answer. But your uncle is wrong to tell you Mr. Goldwin idolized me ; he did not. He treated me shamefully ; he worshipped my beauty—for I was beautiful once—and grudged the possession of it to a successor, which accounts for the intensely selfish conditions of the will, of which you have also been told, of course.'

'I only alluded to your past,' said Una, half

in apology, 'that you might not ask me to bring such experience forward to Jessie as you have suggested I should or ought.'

'You refuse to speak to her about it?'

'I must,' very gently.

'With all your learning you are a fool.'

Mrs. Goldwin was too irritated to pick her words; it was struggle enough to speak without raising her voice. She could have struck Miss Pennacove, but only clenched her gloved right hand instead.

'Excuse me,' said Una stiffly, 'but it seems we are quarrelling. If you ask your coachman to stop, I will get out and walk; we are not far from Virginia Bay now.'

'I beg your pardon,' came the answer, almost bordering on penitence. 'I don't wish to quarrel. But if you strike a match you must expect to see fire. There's a lot of sulphur about me. I don't pretend to be anything but what I am. I'm not a goodie-goodie. You provoked me to call you a fool because you are a fool to yourself.' She softened again; she drew nearer to Una; the clenched hand relaxed and caught at one of Una's. 'Let us understand each other. I am not blind. I quite expected to see Rol bringing you up to me before this, to hear him say, "Here is my

choice." ' Mrs. Goldwin was bending forward to pour all this into Una's ear. Una's head was averted. ' He loves you. I've seen it for a long time, and I—I only wish to study his happiness, though he never confides in me ; but I know more than he may give me credit for. Since Saturday he has changed ; even Mrs. Dripper can see that. You were with him on Saturday. I am his mother, and have a right to ask : can you have refused him ?'

' Yes.'

Una longed to ask how he had changed, but could not. She felt the hand lifted swiftly from her own. The barouche rumbled on ; the coachman sat as if carved in stone, heeding his horses and hearing nothing but murmurs of voices ; and Mrs. Goldwin looked as wretched as if the peace of nations were affected by such a refusal.

' You have !' she cried — almost moaned. ' Why, when he idolizes you ? He will be a millionaire. He is young, handsome, clever. What do you want ? Is it any wonder that I call you a fool ? Be wise, and think over it again.'

' I don't wish to marry,' answered Una with some annoyance, ' and I decline answering any more questions on the matter. Let Rol marry

whomsoever he will, he will never find a sweeter, truer wife than Jessie Lockstud.'

'One more question' Mrs. Goldwin's lips were parched and blue as if from cold. 'Does he know that she indulges in this romance about him?' She gripped Una's arm now as if to shake a reply out of her.

'Yes; I think he does.'

'I know enough.'

The miserable woman leaned back in her carriage, and looked exhausted. Una was in purgatory, but did not know she was not alone in her suffering. It was only in the after-months, when the whole conversation recurred to her, that she knew.

Both ladies reclined in silence. They neither looked at nor addressed each other till the barouche drew up at Unaville.

'Good-bye,' said Una, with her hand extended.

'Good-bye,' returned Mrs. Goldwin, ignoring the hand, and thus proclaiming offence.

Una stepped out of the rack, released at last.

'She is offended with me,' she thought, 'for my audacity in refusing her son, for my determination not to break Jessie's heart. It is as that girl predicted but an hour ago: I have already made an enemy.'

‘I must try another plan,’ muttered Mrs. Goldwin to herself. ‘We must catch at any straw. I have wasted my time on her.’

All her affability and attention had been thrown away.

CHAPTER XI.

FAILING TO STEM THE CURRENT.

THE day after her drive with Mrs. Goldwin Una received another note from Jessie, a very hurried one, announcing that she and her mother had been 'ordered' to take a trip to Wondoo (Wondoo was a pretty country town on the southern line, and something like eighty miles from Phillipia), for her father would have it that she needed change. They were to leave as soon as possible—perhaps to-morrow—would Una come and spend that evening with her? It would be the last for quite a long time, as quite three months were down in the 'sentence' which was to exile them from home.

Una mused over these tidings, and debated whether she should spend an evening at Cecil-lambda or not, for Rol was certain to be there, and she shrank from meeting him. With a

stoical resolution, however, she decided the matter very soon.

‘I will go,’ she said; ‘I must go and learn my lesson properly. If I don’t accustom myself to seeing them together as promised man and wife, to laugh and talk with them in the old way, I never shall learn it. I am glad she is going away for a time. Poor Mid! it will help Roland and me on. For once I am thankful to her father’s imperious dictates.’

That same night she went to Cecillambda and dined there. She was ‘glowing with excitement and colour, as she had been the Saturday night previous, when she had nearly broken the piano strings.

With Mr. Lockstud—who admired her as a sensible, witty, beautiful girl must be admired even by the would-be misogynist, which he certainly was not—she conversed over the dinner table with sparkling fluency; while Roland—also especially asked to dine by Jessie—ate and drank in comparative silence. ‘Oppressed with the thought of parting, poor fellow!’ Jessie told herself.

After dinner Lockstud went to his own room, called the library, and while Jessie and Roland for a little time promenaded the balcony

arm-in-arm, Una played and sang to Mrs. Lockstud and Jack.

'I am getting on,' she thought; 'I am learning my lesson.'

But later on, when she was in her own room, grave doubts arose relative to her progress.

Roland had seen her home, and they had not been alone together since the previous Saturday.

Una, with that will which the girl physiognomist had alluded to as 'obstinacy,' nerved herself to rise to the occasion. She knew what was in his mind, but he could not see into hers. She was utterly wretched, and he believed she was thoroughly happy. Well, that was part of the play. He must continue to believe it.

'You are approaching the great end now,' she began. 'We shall soon have you a B.A.'

'I hope so,' he replied, as they stepped out side by side briskly from Cecillambda to Unaville. 'Will you take my arm?'

'Yes. Mid scarcely likes leaving Phillippia.'

'"The king commands," she says.'

'But it may do her good.'

'It will, and do me good, too. I have been retrogressing lately. My time is short, and I have much to do if I am to succeed. I want

to win, to be something more than a millionaire. At present it is "to be or not to be."

'It is "to be."'

'Thank you for the comforting prediction.' He paused as if to collect his thoughts, and then went on with an irresistible spontaneity: 'You will not think it strange if you don't see me quite so often at Unaville as hitherto. I must pull up for arrears. Jessie has my negligence to answer for—poor Jess, poor Mid! Has she told you anything—that she is happier now? You are our—our sister; you have a right to know.'

'Yes, everything. I wish you—oh, you know what I wish you both.'

Her voice trembled in spite of resolution. His accents of resignation pained her.

'Thank you again. I know—we know you have our interest at heart, of course,' he said quietly. 'Your wish may be fulfilled—in time.'

And then he spoke of other things till they parted at the wicket.

'You will be at the station to see Jessie off to-morrow morning? She told you they would start in the morning?'

'Yes. Good-bye.'

There followed no fervent, lingering pressure

of the hand, no steadfast gaze into her face. He considered himself engaged to Jessie, and honour was his watchword. In her own room her hands went over her breast as if to still a pain there.

‘His mother is right!’ she cried. ‘Oh, he has changed! I wonder if Galileo looked so when, down on his knees and Bible in hand, he abjured the truth before his persecutors, swore away his own convictions. We are both acting a lie. What have I done? I can’t undo it; but it is hard—it is hard. God help us both!’

After a sleepless night she slept later in the morning than usual, but hurried through her toilette and breakfast in order to be at the terminus to see Jessie and her mother off. She reached there rather late, but in time.

Jack Lockstud was superintending the luggage and taking tickets; the second bell was about to ring. There was a babel of sounds—the clanking of heavy heels on the flags to and fro; newsboys shouting; hawkers crying fruit; people talking, laughing, saying adieu; babies grizzling; while those who were about to travel were taking their seats, or piling their bags and rugs within the carriages.

Mrs. Goldwin was there, very much to

Una's surprise, and increased her astonishment by showing a friendly bearing again towards herself when she quite expected disdain.

Mrs. Lockstud and Jessie were already seated in their carriage, and Roland stood at the window talking to them.

Una had no opportunity to say more than a parting word or two, and give a bright smile, for the bell began to swing, and next the signal of departure clanged above all other noises.

Mrs. Lockstud, happier than her daughter in the prospect of a quiet life in the country, was laughing and nodding her head to her friends; and Jessie, whose face was framed at the window with dimmed eyes and pensive mouth, scarcely knew whether to cry or laugh, as she looked her last upon Roland for a few months, and told herself there was nothing to cry for now, for they would soon be reunited to be parted no more. Nevertheless, she lowered her gossamer 'as the long line of carriages began to move slowly out of the station into the open air. Arriving there, it gathered strength, it flew; it was out of sight, and on the Southern line.

'We can drive you home, Miss Pennacove, and Jack too,' proposed Mrs. Goldwin very graciously.

Una, not desirous that Roland should know aught of what had passed between her and his mother, accepted courteously, and she actually found herself once again where she had yesterday determined never more to enter : it was only the beginning of the undermining of her preconceived plans.

She, Roland, and Jack Lockstud returned to Virginia Bay with Mrs. Goldwin in her barouche.

‘The Siamese twins wrenched asunder! who’d have thought it?’ said Jack to Una, referring to her separation from Jessie.

‘“So we grew together like to a double cherry, seeming parted, but yet a union in partition,”’ quoted Roland.

Mrs. Goldwin bent her eyes on Roland.

‘Which is Helena—which is Hermia?’ she asked meaningly.

‘Perhaps Una can tell,’ he said, only thinking of the bond of sisterhood as comparison.

‘Suppose we call Una Hermia, and Jessie Helena?’ suggested Mrs. Goldwin lightly.

Then Una turned, and said :

‘I don’t see how the names apply. Jessie and I will never quarrel as they did, that is certain.’

‘They were only the victims of Puck and

Oberon. There are mischievous imps in the air in these days, I'm thinking,' said Mrs. Goldwin again, with much meaning, 'controlling movements, upsetting plans and hopes.'

To this no answer came, and she and Jack seemed to have all the talk to themselves until the drive terminated, Una and Roland merely interpolating a word here and there.

After this, the ensuing weeks rolled by very quietly for Una. She saw Roland but seldom; and even the quaint society of Washington Larry was denied her, for he had left Phillipia temporarily to take a run over to the neighbouring colonies, and so kill time till Roland's attainment of his majority. As Roland had hinted to him his intention of visiting Knutsford, he determined to wait and accompany him. And he did not forget to send Una 'a tremendous whack of a present,' for, provided with a list of books and another of music by Roland, he attended to the former guide from A to Z, and forwarded a handsome cabinet filled with choice works; but the latter he viciously tore to shreds, for he recognised a woman's handwriting in it, and the ogre of the nursery rhyme, who growled,

'Fee, fi, fo, fum !

I smell the blood of an Englishman,'

was not more sanguinary in his intentions than Larry felt over that scrap of paper, with its angular legible characters that he felt were traced by the hand of a Lockstud. He sniffed and grunted out, 'I smell the blood of a Lockstud!' and thereupon consigned the music list to perdition.

The receipt of this handsome gift was an exquisite momentary pleasure to Una, and if he had seen her glowing face as she examined each book, he would have been more than repaid, even if he had heard her ripple of laughter over a couple of lines scrawled on a sheet of letter-paper which he placed in the parcel, which read thus :

'May they give as much pleasure to you as to him that sends them! May they be twice blessed, "him that gives and him that takes," as the Scripture puts it!'

Mountfu, who had long since forgotten his repulse, still hovered about her whenever he could get the chance, but thought she was neglecting her music. Neither music nor books seemed to give her the same delight as formerly.

Letters came from Jessie to her frequently—bright letters.

'I like Wondoo very much,' she wrote ; 'and

mamma looks splendid. It was she who wanted change, not I. There are lots of nice people here, and really it isn't dull a bit, with concerts, entertainments, and amateur theatricals; and with it all there is a delightful freedom somehow, which one doesn't find in the big city; and, oh! I was nearly forgetting to tell you that the Lannagers are here, too, recruiting. The smiling mother, and the two eldest girls, and their adorable brother came up last Friday to remain till the following Monday; this arrangement is to be repeated every week, I believe. You will pity me, for he was my shadow, and will be every time he comes; but I don't care now, and I snub him unmercifully. Mrs. Lannager and the girls are overpoweringly attentive to us. The former makes me sick, with her "*my dear*" and "*my darling*" whenever we meet; and if I were a fool—she evidently thinks me one, else she wouldn't behave so—I might get conceited in believing all she says about me to my face.'

'They are all conspiring to get her for Frank Lannager, I think—his family and her father and Mrs. Goldwin,' commented Una, puzzled to know why Mr. Lockstud and Mrs. Goldwin could possibly object to her becoming Roland's wife. She gave it up.

Like Roland, she was studying her hardest. Like him, she wanted to win for the glory of achievement the 'something attempted, something done,' that lifts us above the pettiness that clogs the world and makes us feel life is not the mere racing for pleasure and sordid gain. So the weeks sped, till one morning Una received a telegram containing but two words, 'To be,' and signed 'Roland Goldwin'; and she knew he had successfully passed his ordeal, and was what she hoped to be a year hence—a Bachelor of Arts.

'He would not come and tell me himself,' she said, and sighed. 'He will be of age soon, and what then? Oh, what a fool I am!'

With the folly still her master, she folded the telegram tenderly, and put it away carefully in her desk. Jessie received a telegram, too, only the tidings were couched in the ordinary jerky way, but so excited the recipient that she all but cried for joy. Mrs. Lockstud could not blame her, for she was likewise pleasantly agitated, for she loved the lad to whom her daughter was affianced. Having written to her husband glowingly of the pleasure she experienced in the change to Wondoo, he wrote back, desiring her to extend her stay by all means. The fact of his desiring it was

looked upon as a mandate, and accepted by wife and daughter with the usual submission, but it led to their absence from Phillipia when Roland, having emerged from his legal infancy, took the millionaire's cloak on his shoulders. He had especially requested his mother to let the day of his majority pass without ostentation of any kind; he did not want a purposeless expenditure on himself, and it suited her to yield graciously to his wishes. Yet it dawned with oppression; its strength was maimed, and he could not welcome it with that eagerness with which he had but recently anticipated its coming. He delighted in his inheritance—he loved it as the primary factor in his future actions. Upon the mere thought of it he had constructed mentally innumerable monuments which should hand down to posterity his father's name with reverence, blessing, and gratitude. All this was unchanged; the airy palaces floated still before his mind's eye, only they were seen no more through rose-coloured glasses. Perhaps the imps—as his mother had observed in reference to their present existence and mischievous pranks—were hovering near, and had snatched them from him to substitute a jaundiced pair. The ardent longing to possess was gone, and he took his wealth as a man with-

out palate swallows his food ; naturally craving nourishment, he yet eats without relish, without that exquisite, indescribable sensation which is known as taste, and constitutes one of the leading pleasures of vigorous health.

But Roland was too much of a philosopher not to make the best of what fell to his share—not to try and draw honey even from nettles.

‘ Perhaps,’ he reasoned, ‘ we are like greedy children, wanting to clutch at more than our due ; should we, like them, rebel because it is withheld ? This constant fruitless craving compels us to look towards the Golden Shore, where, if we may touch it, we may find at last the pearl of price—sweet content. Who can say here, “ Hold ! I have enough ? ” ’

The morning of his twenty-first birthday arrived, with low, murky clouds and drizzling rain ; it was quite chilly and unseasonable, and seemed in sympathy with his own humour. Saving for birthday cards and written congratulations from Wondoo and Unaville, a visit from Mr. Lockstud and Jack quite in the early morning to give him joy, and an urgent telegram from Washington Larry, stating that he would be in Phillipia on the morrow, was detained through an attack of lumbago, and wishing him luck, the day passed as all other days. It was the

morning after that brought distinction of a kind.

It was still cloudy and cold, and when he met his mother at the breakfast-table, the weather seemed to be reflected on her face with an additional heaviness of electricity, repressed fire, and threatening storm.

Roland was weather-wise regarding the domestic atmosphere. He knew she was angry at something—whether with him or somebody else he waited for time to disclose. He said ‘Good-morning,’ and took his place at the table. She gave him a chilly, stiff response, and began to help him to his coffee.

He assisted her to a rissole, and next himself, but remained mute for two reasons: a servant was in attendance for one, and his experience of her disposition for another. He knew it was best to maintain silence until she chose to break it. As soon as they were quite alone she did break it. He threw a covert glance at her as she, stirring her coffee, was gazing into the cup with that sternness and severity which he knew meant aggression. She might have been a priestess of the Delphi oracle, trying to gather a forecast from the coffee-fumes. Then she slowly raised her eyes and looked at him. She spoke with a studied calmness.

‘You look as if you had lost a property, instead of having just been put in possession; and you *ought* to be elated—that is, if your conscience were clear.’

He stared at her as if she had spoken to him in an unknown tongue.

‘I don’t understand you,’ he said, not very good-temperedly, and disinclined to find fault with his conscience.

‘No!’—lightning flashed from her eyes; there was suppressed thunder in her voice—‘because you are the model son, because you can never do wrong, not even when you have attempted to hoodwink—only attempted, mind, not succeeded—your mother, even when the “serpent’s tooth” is poisoning me. You ungrateful, double-faced, traitor——’

He rose before she could finish the word; his countenance changed utterly; all its boyish frankness gave way to sullen anger. He tried to speak—to demand an explanation, but could not; and she, glaring at him with the frenzy of a wild cat bristling before a mastiff, saw the passion struggling in his face—the knit brows—saw the resemblance that Jessie had once seen, and, with an exclamation of distress, covered up her eyes as if suddenly smote there, and then rose too and hurried from the room.

He stared after her, wrathful, dumb, wonder-stricken. Her conduct was incomprehensible, beyond endurance. What had he said or done to deserve her rebuke—to be called ungrateful, double-faced, treacherous? His conscience was clear enough, but his heart was in a ferment, his brain in a whirl.

He also left the room, and strode to his study; on his way he passed his mother's door, and he heard a bitter weeping, but felt no pity. There came a painful tightness at his throat, and hot tears to his eyes, as he paced his study to and fro. This injustice threatened to flood his philosophy; the unmerited reproach was harder to bear even than Una's refusal; for there his self-respect had not been wounded. Presently he ceased to walk, and stood before a window, where the sun shone on his hair, and the scent of flowers from the terrace beneath was wafted; but he was insensible to both.

He might have been ten minutes thus, when he, standing with his back to the study-door, heard its handle turn. He knew nobody would enter there unbidden but one, yet he never turned, as with ears intent he was aware that the door was being shut to again and locked, and that somebody was advancing with a rustle of drapery and softest of footfalls.

‘I must speak to you,’ said his mother with her usual decisiveness, but huskily, as she took a seat quite near him.

‘I am listening,’ he said, without a movement.

‘Well, sit down,’ she commanded.

With an obedience like second nature, he drew a chair and obeyed, but half turned his back upon her.

‘You hide your face—you are right,’ she said. ‘I never knew you had so much of the fiend in you ; it terrified me—it made me run away.’

‘Is that all you came to speak about?’ he asked.

‘No ; it has nothing to do with it. I have recovered. I am calmer. I was angry—you were angry. People can’t talk rationally when they are mad with temper. I must talk rationally. You have deceived me.’

Mrs. Goldwin spoke spasmodically, chokingly, but with a remarkable drop from severity to gentleness.

‘Yes, you have deceived me,’ she went on. ‘Have I not done a mother’s duty ? You treat me like a nonentity. Your crowning sin is your clandestine engagement—you are engaged to Jessie Lockstud.’

Roland, having meant to acquaint his mother with that circumstance this very week of his majority, did not feel convicted. He started slightly at her premature knowledge, but, nothing abashed, and with his eyes on the window, he replied coldly :

‘ You have deprived me of a duty meant to be undertaken this week. I intended to tell you everything.’

Mrs. Goldwin, scarcely prepared to meet this avowal, gasped :

‘ You don’t deny it, then — YOU ARE ENGAGED?’

‘ Why deny it? May I ask your informant?’

Mrs. Goldwin did not answer for a moment. Had he glanced at her just then, her death-like whiteness would have alarmed him. After a pause, she said :

‘ I will tell you my informant presently, and you may think what you like about me. The end justifies the means. No woman likes to think that her son is determined to marry a girl without half a dozen ideas in her head—a silly sawdust——’

‘ I must remind you,’ he interrupted sternly, ‘ you are speaking of my future wife.’

Mrs. Goldwin winced ever so slightly, and the death-hue was still in her face. She

clasped her hands and raised her tones ; there was a wild entreaty in them.

‘No, no ; you must not say so, you don’t mean it ! She will NEVER be your wife ! You don’t love her. You love the beautiful blue-stocking, and she has refused your love.’

Roland turned sharply and faced her at last, but was too agitated to note her deathly pallor.

‘Why should I speak of my private affairs, since you can divine them ?’ he said.

‘I don’t divine. I use my eyes and ears and tongue if necessary. The more reticent you are, the more watchful I am, understand. You have changed lately in face, in manner. Do you think I put it down to your over-study ? Pshaw ! You might have spared yourself unnecessary pain, had you consulted me ; but I have had to bide my time and worm out your secret—would-be secret even if compelled to resort to jesuitical means.’

Her right hand stole to her pocket—a satin lap on her maroon morning-gown—and drew out a letter, which she tossed to him with :

‘There ! that is my informant.’

It fell at his feet. He stooped and picked it up. It was one received from Jessie the day previous, full of congratulations and passionate yearning to be near him on that day. He

slipped it into his breast-pocket without a word, and resumed his standing position at the window, again with his back on his mother.

‘Well,’ she asked impatiently, and with her ire rising once more at his contemptuous silence, ‘is it a reliable authority?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Is that all you have to say?’

‘If you force me to speak,’ he answered, with bitterness surging at his heart, and filial honour suffering a twist in the wrong direction, ‘I may say too much. You have not trusted me; you might have done so, for I can lay my hand on my breast and declare before God’—he raised his hand—‘that in my duty to you I have never failed; and you know it!’ he swerved round for a second. ‘You might have known that no irrevocable step would have been taken without first consulting you. As to our engagement, why, as Jessie says, it began when we were children, and she has looked upon me as her future husband for years. Before any actual engagement can be established between us, one known to all interested, her father has a right to be consulted; but before doing so I intended speaking to you.’

‘Also of your asking Una to be your wife, and her refusal, I presume.’

She was striving to be gentle, but could not resist flinging this taunt at him as he stood facing the window, his arms hanging listlessly at his sides, the blood impelled to his hands, disfigured, like his face, with swollen veins.

Unheeding her insinuation, he went on :

‘I intended speaking to you, I say, but, as treachery or theft have been your aids in gathering information, there is no need for me to speak. Only you may rest assured that I shall now marry Mid with or without your consent. Your action and cruel words this hour have forfeited your future authority over mine.’

Then, as if wishing to intimate the interview was over, he turned to leave the room, but did not.

Mrs. Goldwin, sick and faint, felt her senses swim ; she stood up and reeled towards her son. Her will was potent ; yet she all but screamed as she cried out in agony :

‘Roland ! Roland ! I see my fault ; forgive me !’

And then if her next move had been a blow it would not have so surprised or affected him. Her appeal for forgiveness stirred him strangely ; full of emotion, he stopped short at the point of exit, and returned, with her call to him ringing

in his brain, to see her at his feet, with her hands uplifted in supplication.

‘See,’ she cried, ‘your mother kneels to you!’

Again the bitter salty tears rushed to his eyes; hot and unforgiving hitherto, he could not quite resist such a sudden reversal of disposition, especially from one to whom humility and submission were but words. He stooped to lift her; she would not be lifted.

‘Don’t kneel to me, for heaven’s sake!’ he almost sobbed.

‘Yes, yes, I must. I stole that letter from your escritoire; it was done for your sake, but it was wrong.’ She screened her face, and spoke from between her hands. ‘You have altered; you look older, haggard. You have told me nothing, and out of pity for you I got at the truth. You have engaged yourself to Jessie, and yet you love Una. I swear it! and I know more than that: SHE LOVES YOU!’

‘You are wrong—all wrong,’ he answered, looking down upon her helplessly.

‘It is God’s truth!’ she exclaimed; ‘but she has refused you. You do not know women’s hearts; she will not share your attentions to Jessie. Women understand women. I understand her; she has refused you out of pique, and

you have engaged yourself to Jessie for the same reason. I ferreted out her letter that I might be able to advise—to help you. I will not rise till you say, “I forgive you; your zeal has impelled you to deceit, but still I forgive you.”’

‘Forgive you!’ Roland certainly blubbered outright. ‘God help us both to forgive and forget! Who am I to withhold forgiveness from anybody, much less you? Oh! do get up; you are breaking my heart!’

She rose; her eyes were bloodshot, and fixed in fear on his countenance, so swollen with grief and so trembling at the lips; she put out both hands to him, and he took them and led her gently to a chair, wondering at her docility, for her caprice had never taken such a turn as this.

‘Consider this subject closed for to-day at least,’ he urged; ‘we have had enough of it.’

‘No—no; it is not closed yet,’ she said, with a little gasp. ‘I want you to think over all I have said. You must not risk your future happiness. You must marry Una because she loves you and you love her.’

He stood by her chair now.

‘Has she told you so?’ he muttered, with a twitching mouth.

‘Not with her tongue, but with her eyes, her

actions. I have seen it as I have seen you changed since that Saturday afternoon some months ago when she was here. She must have refused you then, because she is a girl who will not be satisfied with half your devotion.'

'She is a girl,' he replied, 'who is not capable of the meanness you would impute to her, too noble for petty jealousy, too true a friend to Jessie to begrudge her what you call my attentions, too unselfish not to rejoice in her happiness and show a pure sisterly affection. I have told you that Jessie has considered me her future husband all along ; but for a time that belief was shaken, and it fretted her enough to cause illness. It was for me to undo the mischief. I have undone it, and Una does not love me with the love that both you and I only fancied she did.'

'She does — I swear she does!' Mrs. Goldwin's voice, pitched high, yet seemingly smothered, cried out like one in a nightmare. She tottered to her feet. 'You must give her up ; she is no wife for you ; you are all wrong. She is——'

'To be my wife,' said Roland, with severe emphasis.

Mrs. Goldwin's face, white and drawn, was

full of terror as she prophesied, like Cassandra, to incredulous ears :

‘ Never ! never ! never !’

And with that she alarmed him considerably by dropping into her chair ; for now something took place that had no precedent in her life : Isabella Goldwin was in a swoon.

CHAPTER XII.

A BULWARK OF STRAW.

THEODORE LOCKSTUD sat in his library awaiting a visitor, for whom he had been prepared by a note received but a couple of hours previously. Roland was coming, and the herald announcing that fact was in his hand now as he read it for the second time. It was between seven and eight on the night of the day of Mrs. Goldwin's swoon ; and he, with knitted brows and moustache ends caught between his teeth, re-read her hurried lines.

The gaslight flaming high over his head cast a sickly glare on his face, which within the last few weeks had become hollow-cheeked.

The sound of approaching footsteps ascending the staircase made him nervously ribbon the note ; but as if not satisfied with that, he threw it on to an ash-plate, lit a match and consumed it.

When Roland entered the library, Lockstud presented the aspect of luxurious and contented indolence in his dressing-gown and slippers, and reclining in an easy-swinging chair, with a cigar in his mouth and a newspaper in his lap ; but the smell of burned paper greeted Roland's nostrils as he opened the door after a gentle rap at it, and Lockstud's 'Come in.'

'Ah! you're to time ; how do you do?' he said, without rising, as he shook hands with Roland, who noticed that his hand was clammy cold and disagreeable, while his manner was a little over-airy, and in contradiction to his habitual reserve.

'You find me indulging. I always do at this hour. Will you have a cigar?'

Roland declined with thanks, and, eager to open the business which had brought him there, said :

'You expected me, I know.'

'Yes. Your mother was good enough to send me a few lines. Sit down, and let us talk it over.'

His manner set Roland more at ease than he otherwise would have been. He took his seat exactly opposite the bank manager, and asked openly :

'What did she tell you?' His mother's note

had rushed him rather in proposing to Lockstud for his daughter ; for, with her determination to let Jessie's father know what had happened as soon as possible, she made hesitation impossible on the part of Roland by writing that afternoon of her agitating interview, when she felt sufficiently recovered to do so. But as yet he was to learn whether Lockstud would show an unreasonable obstinacy or not, whether his mother had referred to her own objections to his suit, so he inquired, 'What did she tell you ?'

'That you are in a hurry to fetter yourself with incumbrances, and don't know when you are well off. She said much more that was wise and to the purpose, but that wouldn't interest you, I'm sure.'

Roland began to flick at his legs with his handkerchief, not conscious of what he was doing. Lockstud had waved a straw in his face to show which way the wind blew, and he thought his mother responsible for the opposing breath. He resolved to let no opposition stand in his way ; he had promised to marry Jessie, and marry her he would.

'I presume from your concurrence in her wisdom that you are not inclined to favour me,' he said quietly.

‘Perhaps so.’

Lockstud puffed a cloud of smoke into the air; his back was turned to the light, so that his face was in shade.

‘Why?’ Roland flushed up with some just indignation. ‘My age, my position, can be no obstacles, or do you think I am neither mentally nor physically qualified to undertake the duties of married life? I might have spoken to you before, but thought it premature, and best to wait till I was of age. Mid—Jessie and I—have known each other since we were children—babies; we ask your consent to our union. If you give her to me, I will do my utmost to be worthy of her.’

He would not bring forward, as an argument in his favour that he would be able to gladden her with unlimited luxuries, that he would make a handsome settlement on her, for he thought Mr. Lockstud should accept him at once, without such a reminder.

Had any other but Roland so pleaded—that other being a millionaire and of unquestionable integrity—Lockstud would have been dazzled at the mere thought of such an alliance for his daughter; but this was one of the tantalizing ways of a contrary world; for Roland happened to be the wrong man, and Lockstud

was anxious to impress this upon him. His answer made Roland flush again.

‘Now look here, my good lad—you are only a lad—be guided by me. You are rash to ask for one girl when you are in love with another.’

Lockstud puffed another cloud ; he had never discussed a matter before with this lad, who was as a son of the house, with such easy familiarity. His apparent indifference to Roland’s proposal was discomfiting, but his latter remark was more than that to a heart sensitive as a woman’s ; it was humiliating.

Roland jumped up from his chair excitedly.

‘I see my mother has acquainted you with something else that should interest me.’

‘Don’t blame her,’ Lockstud said quickly, suddenly reverting to his natural self, and tilting himself forward in his chair, letting the paper fall to the ground ; ‘she is acting for the best in trusting me. You have never known a father, and she has always consulted me in regard to your interests.’ His eyes rested kindly on this undesirable suitor as they were raised to the flushed face, and all his assumed nonchalance fell from manner and words alike. ‘I am seemingly cold,’ he added, with a decided tenderness, ‘but I have enough warmth

in me to excite a real friendship for you and a desire to take that father's place. I have felt so for years. Now sit down again, and don't lose your temper.'

Lockstud held his cigar in his fingers and forgot to return it to his mouth. Roland, re-seated by request, stared at him with an expression of mingled curiosity and hostility, scarcely grateful for his avowed friendship.

'And you laugh at me for a son-in-law?'

'You misunderstand me. You think, perhaps, because I say so little generally, that my observation is scanty like my words; if you do, you are wrong. It is because my observation is keen that I say to you, without hints from anybody, go to that other girl and ask her to be your wife, if you will rush into matrimony; but most young men—of your position, especially—would not be in such haste, would like to try their wings and be free for a few years before settling down.'

'And supposing, I say,' Roland reasoned, 'that the other young lady is not for me even for the asking, that she has no desire to marry—probably from not yet having met her ideal—that next to her I do love Jessie dearly, and have asked her to be my wife, that she shall not pine, thinking that love for her less intense

than hers for me? I will be a true husband to her, and all my study shall be her happiness. If you part us, you will break her heart.'

'But not yours,' was the quick rejoinder. Cool as Lockstud had been, he was now rising in temperature, and beads of perspiration had to be wiped from his face and lips. 'Roland, you are a clever fellow,' he said in his own dictatorial way, but not harshly, 'yet with all your cleverness you are bordering on imbecility. You want to run your head into a noose that won't strangle you right out, but will keep you in a life-long coil, and I don't want you to do it. My regard for you would be poor indeed did I allow that imbecility to run riot without some effort to check it.' Lockstud coughed, cleared his throat, and dabbed his moustache with his handkerchief, then went on with much earnestness: 'You are of age, certainly; still, you are a lad in ideas - a mere girl as far as a knowledge of the world is concerned. You have not arrived at years of discretion: go and travel; taste the joys of a life abroad with a bachelor's fling--with no wife and baggage; mix more with men, and you will come back a man. You will have changed your mind, and be ready to thank me for my counsel.'

'No.' Roland tossed his head proudly; his

clear eyes flashed out a defiance. 'You are mistaken in me. I have given my word; it is my bond. What I say to you to-night I shall say a year, two years, ten years hence - that is, if Jessie thinks as she does at present.'

Lockstud knew that well enough, but it did not suit him to outwardly admit it, and he spoke next with all his old acerbity :

'Jessie is a child without a mind of her own. In less than a year, should you go away, she will pine for a lover at her elbow, and be ready to take the first one offered to fill your place and pass the time. Because you have grown up together, and she has, of course, a sisterly fondness for you, she thinks it is love. Bah! electroplate love; it will wear out.'

'You are mistaken in her,' Roland said in that tone of quiet rebuke which is most effective.

Lockstud frowned as he heard, but a moment after his features softened once again, and, unable to sit quietly, he got out of his swinging-chair and began to walk up and down the room as if in thought.

For a little while there was utter silence, then Lockstud stood by Roland, and laid a hand gently on the young man's shoulder.

'Be led by me,' he pleaded.

His voice shook ; his attitude was such an expansion of his hitherto concealed nature that Roland, being permitted to witness it, felt nervous and constrained as he heard that 'Be led by me,' uttered so strangely soft that it produced from him a docile 'What would you have me do?'

'I would have you less headstrong, more willing to be guided by one who has had experience. Experience bought is better than experience taught ; in one way it is harder to bear, but impressionable. One is burnt into our life ; the other is but a temporary coating, easily rubbed off. Bought experience of a hard kind is flame and flood which I would save you from.'

Lockstud lifted his hand and took another turn down the library and back again, to stand still before Roland, who sat bent forward, with his arms resting on his knees, his hands closed together, his eyes on the carpet, and continued:

'That beautiful girl who does not reciprocate your love for her still exists, remember. Wherever she may be, to whomsoever she may belong, she will still exist for you ; living or dead, she will haunt you, she will never be out of your thoughts. Seek her again ; make her love you—you can—and marry her. But if

you persist in keeping faith with Jessie - though it is noble and has a dash of romance—the fire will burn, the waters will flood you. You say to yourself, I have sworn to love and cherish her. You say it because she comforts you now with a devotion which heals your sore heart in a temporary way ; but it will be never healed. There will come a time when the duty will become a yoke, and the wife a burden - an encumbrance. I have forethought, and know you will heap up misery for yourself and her. She is my daughter ; I am fond of her, though I may not show it, and in her interests, as well as yours, I say I do not wish to give her to a man who can't offer her a whole heart, and who may in course of years let her see this and make her wretched. I argue the question with you, when I might dismiss you with a peremptory "No," because of my regard for you - because I desire you not to have any ill-will towards me.'

Roland stood up, too, and faced his counsellor, with a second proud toss of his head.

'Mr. Lockstud,' he replied, 'I have listened to you with the respect due to your maturer years, not to your argument. You harp on that other young lady who can never be more to me than a dear friend. If I once thought otherwise, it was owing to my own conceit or

blindness. As for suing a second time for a favour, I never did it yet—I never will; and I maintain that where a noble-natured woman gives her whole heart and soul to a man, and he accepts it, that man is no man if by one single action he forfeits her implicit trust, or can ever feel her presence a burden, or his duty to her a yoke. I am prepared to take Jessie, and must resent the word “burden” as a cruel one—one for a coward. You wrong Jessie, you wrong me. She will never change, and in that case neither shall I.’

He would not receive Lockstud’s past experience as a future guide. Was he to be measured by the standard of such a husband as Theodore Lockstud, whose marital principles would not bear strong light, and were not pardonable, even supposing them to be the result of disappointment? for he had no doubt whatever but that Jessie’s father had exposed a page of his own early manhood for an example.

The moral force of his character opposed the idea of a possible ‘encumbrance’ or ‘burden’ being embodied in Jessie, or any woman that he should once and for all vow to love and cherish. Such a thought was an outrage—a violation of that self-esteem of which he had enough to ensure personal dignity, without an

undue prominence over the higher-classed sentiments. He felt that Mr. Lockstud was viewing him as he would a schoolboy, with no settled convictions as yet of right or wrong - chiding him like a child.

In what estimation could he be held that anybody should predict such a vacillation of mind as that, leading to his degeneration into a coward and a rogue? He would prove he was neither; so his answer was given rather pointedly considering the man to whom he gave it.

It was unexpected - more than Lockstud could bear quite patiently, though he did not want to show how much it annoyed, it stung him. Urbanity fled, however, and chilly politeness took its place, while something of that demoniacal expression which his family knew so well as peculiar to him in smothered rage distorted his face now, as he and Roland stood *vis-à-vis*. They were of the one height, these two men, of the same proportions; both handsome; and whether it was the passion in the countenance of the elder reflected on that of the younger man, just in that moment a similarity of distortion appeared in both. Both were angry.

'Am I to understand you will not take "No"'

for an answer?' said Lockstud, with parched lips, but struggling to be calm and cool, and ignoring Roland's condemnation of his argument.

'You are to understand that I have asked for Jessie in a straightforward way, that I have no intention to admit the possibility of becoming a villain, that I intend to marry her whenever she is ready. I don't know why you and my mother raise objections, for you can produce no just impediment to prevent our marriage, and I can't accept in an amicable spirit a reasoning which to me is sophistry.'

Roland spoke out warmly. Mr. Lockstud abruptly turned his back upon him, and gave him no immediate reply. He strode moodily away as far as the library door, and pausing there for a couple of minutes, retraced his steps and faced Roland once more.

'You can't marry her without my consent; she is under age. Wait at least till she is twenty-one.'

'This suggestion, if acted upon, would afford a respite,' thought Lockstud.

'I wish to do nothing rash; I merely ask for your sanction to our present betrothal—that is all,' said Roland simply, as if it were the easiest thing for Lockstud to say 'Yes' to his proposal.

Lockstud mused before he made answer, pulled at his moustache, and at length appeared to bend slightly by saying :

‘ I’ll think it over talk it over with your mother. I’ll say no more to-night.’

‘ When will you say more ?’

‘ Soon ; not now--not another word.’

After that there was nothing for Roland to do but to go. As he closed the door behind him, Lockstud threw himself into his swinging-chair, and, being alone, gave way to exhaustion of body, and so groaned aloud as if in writhing pain.

Mrs. Goldwin, obeying the summons sent by wire the following morning from the bank-manager that business imperative demanded her presence at the bank, was ushered into the manager’s room as early as eleven o’clock.

Lockstud turned the key in the door as she entered, set a chair for her, and seated himself at his office-table. No salutations were exchanged ; the business on hand was serious enough to absorb all their thought, and set aside polite conventionality. They both looked frightened.

‘ Well, the result is not satisfactory, then ?’ she queried.

‘ No.’

Lockstud pressed his head between his hands and leaned forward on his elbows ; his aspect was not cheering.

‘Has he said nothing to you of our talk last night?’

‘Nothing. When I asked him how you had received him, his answer was: “As you no doubt anticipated. I refer you to him,” and he looked sulky. I have not seen him since last night. He has thrown off his humility and obedience with his minority ; he won’t bear the bit in his jaws ; he is no longer under my control, and it is not my policy to offend him. I hope you followed my advice and treated him with exemplary patience.’

‘Cilla herself could scarcely have borne a trial with more mildness. I remembered your caution in my maddest moments, when I could have wrung my hands and yelled with frenzy.’

‘It was well you did. I know him better since yesterday. You may lead him with tact, but driving will upset everything—he won’t be driven ; and he is beginning to be suspicious, I know he is. That is why I told you to send for me to come to the bank, as if on business. I don’t want you to be coming to the house to hold private consultations. Now go on ; tell me, what did you say to him?’

‘I reasoned with him,’ Lockstud said, with his head up now, and a right hand on the table, nervously clenched. ‘He was polite enough to call my reasoning sophistry ; he has determined to marry Jessie. Pleasant, isn’t it ? How will it end ? I’m half inclined to make a clean breast to him of the whole concern—in confidence.’

‘And then ?’

‘Tumble accidentally into the bay and stop there, or shoot myself.’

‘You are talking nonsense. If anybody should be annihilated, it is the cause of this wretched complication ; but as we can’t smother her, or lock her up in a lunatic asylum like one of Miss Braddon’s heroines, we must try something else as effective if not criminating.’

‘I wish she had never been born !’

‘So do I ; but she was born and lives, and at present claims Roland as her future husband. We have to deal with what is——’ She tapped her foot impatiently. ‘Your courage is turning white.’

‘I confess it to be weaker than yours.’

‘Well, I quailed yesterday, for all that. Did you ever know me to faint ? He took such a firm stand, and, besides, he looked so—*so like his father*, that he terrified me. We dare not

raise the devil in him (for he can get angry like you or me), for then the likeness comes to the surface—only then—a shadowy likeness, but to be avoided if possible; otherwise it might be dangerous.'

'Oh, why did you forge such a handcuff for yourself and for me? why did I listen to you?' Lockstud's head went down on his hands. 'It is killing me!'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'You said it was an atonement, I remember; but you were as anxious as I was to defeat Paul Pry, though you wouldn't admit it. And it was not for atonement.'

'I am to see him again,' cried Lockstud, in a tone of despair, and apparently unheeding her remarks. 'And what in the name of heaven am I to say—to do? Shall I refuse him once and for all, or allow him to kiss and caress her with the privilege of a lover?'

'Do the last—make a show of acceptance—if you don't you will drive him to immediate opposition. Get the girl back under your own eye—prevail upon him to go abroad. Only get him away for a year or more, perhaps, and before he comes back let Jessie console herself with Lannager, or make her—that is better. She shall meet him again as Mrs. Lannager, or

my name is anything but what it is. We must not let trifles stand in our way.'

'You think it can be managed?'

'It *must* be managed—it is our last resource. I will tell him to see you again to-night, and then you are to accept him conditionally—that is, if he chooses to please you by going away for a year or two. Say one year, it sounds lighter; say it is necessary to prove his fidelity by absence—it will satisfy you.' Mrs. Goldwin ceased for a second, and then, with a new idea just conceived, she added: 'Stop, we will have no more interviews with him; you might forget yourself. I won't trust you with him. Write, and at once, and I'll give him the letter with the meekness of a mouse. If I ever cared for him at all, I did so yesterday. I hate men without a spirit. I did something else yesterday that you will never guess. Did Isabella Goldwin ever go down on her knees before to a living creature? Well, I did that, too. I knew my hold was gone on him for the theft of that letter, and I tried to win it back, and did soften him. In my eagerness I failed; stealing a love-letter and reading it was a mistake, for he did not mean to keep me in ignorance as I thought, and his words and manner since are stiff and cool.'

‘A mistake—a crime from beginning to end, to hunt us to shame and misery,’ muttered Lockstud, not caring to conceal his fears, his useless regret, at which she scoffed with a hard laugh.

‘You are a craven; you fear detection, not the action,’ she said; and then peremptorily: ‘Write!’

Without further speech he drew paper before him, and wrote almost as she dictated.

She carried the letter away with her, and the writer, as soon as he was alone, scowled and cursed her below his breath.

‘She has revenged herself on me!’ he groaned, ‘and I am helpless in her toils.’

Mrs. Goldwin determined to carry out all her designs, and, more hopeful with the prospect of success, met an evidence of the vanity of human wishes immediately on her return to Goolgun.

In her own room she found a note from Roland to tell her that he had left Phillipia for a short time to have a run up to Wondoo.

‘Perhaps,’ he wrote, ‘Mr. Lockstud, by the time I return, will have his answer ready when you and he shall have “talked it over.”’

She had counted upon seeing him at once, and noting the effect of Lockstud’s conditional acceptance; now she had to sit down and wait.

Wondoo was only eighty miles away, certainly ; but for her, when eager for the advance of her plans, it might have been as far as England at that moment. Besides, the Lannagers were at Wondoo, and she considered it most unfortunate that they should see Roland and Jessie together, who might betray by some sign their relations ; Jessie would, if he did not. She ground her teeth and compressed her lips. 'How like him to run away without ever hinting his intention of doing so !' she thought. There was nothing to be done but to forward Lockstud's letter to Wondoo ; it might put Roland in a better temper, and mollify his disposition towards her.

While at her desk in the act of enclosing it in another envelope, there came a knock at the door, and, without waiting for permission to enter, the person knocking walked in. It was Mrs. Dripper—Mrs. Dripper, a weak combination of housekeeper, companion, and factotum, but strong in neither. She always wore black and a matronly muslin cap, and was thin, spare, and wiry, nervous in her ways, but quiet, and most desirous to appear genteel. She was kind to those under her in Mrs. Goldwin's employ, and ready to befriend them even with a liberal dip in her purse, which was supposed to be

pleasantly heavy, owing to her receipt of a fair salary.

Her daughter was comfortably married, and a goodly portion of her savings were, by the advice of Mr. Lockstud—who treated her with the respect and consideration due to the old servant of an old friend—invested in the Nabob Mine, which was expected to return tenfold to her, as it was to her mistress, in course of time. But whether it was the privilege of long service, or an assumption of equality with her mistress, Mrs. Dripper was often guilty of provoking slips in that deference to Mrs. Goldwin which, as a generous mistress, was her right. She was guilty at the present moment.

Mrs. Goldwin looked up from her desk, and, strange to say, did not resent the intrusion.

‘What do you want of me?’ she meekly asked, as Mrs. Dripper approached her.

‘Where has Master Roland gone?’

‘To Wondoo for a few days.’

‘I did his packing for him in ten minutes, and he said he was going to have a holiday; but he didn’t tell me everything; there is something the matter. What is it?’

‘I can’t see anything serious in a young man taking a holiday if he feels inclined.’ Mrs. Goldwin wrote as she spoke, and tried to laugh easily.

Mrs. Dripper drew nearer, and overlooked as Roland's address was completed on the envelope.

'No,' she said; 'but there's something serious to make you swoon; I never knew you to do that. People don't swoon for nothing. And he wouldn't stop for breakfast this morning. And you were not up for it, yet you were out when I took you the note at eleven, the time he told me to give it you, telling me not to disturb you before; and you never told me anything about it. And yesterday I heard him sobbing—yes, sobbing—and I could have taken him in my arms, as I did when he was a baby, to hush him on my breast. I love every bone in his body, every hair on his head; I'd lay down my life for him, I would; he is dearer than my own child; I feel for him as you never felt, and never will, and I won't stand by and see harm come to him, if you are plotting harm now that you don't want him any longer! So you'd better tell me all about it—why you swooned, why he sobbed, why you went out to-day, when you were better fit to be at home.'

Mrs. Goldwin listened quietly with her lips set like steel, and her eyes glittering with a wild light.

‘I have done him a service,’ she said. ‘Why should you think I want to harm him? Mr. Lockstud and I are plotting for him now for good; but it is hard work. If you must know, he has engaged himself to Jessie Lockstud. Now do you understand?’

Mrs. Dropper’s eyes started as she heard; her lips bleached; the fingers of both her hands struggled together as if to knot right to left, and she exclaimed:

‘Good Lord! what can you do — tell him?’

‘No; we will get out of the difficulty. I will tell you when all is arranged.’

Mrs. Dropper wrung her hands and moaned; then, without another word, she escaped from the room.

Mrs. Goldwin shivered as she watched her.

‘I declare I’ve caught Theo’s white liver. I begin to tremble at everything. I fear that woman; she will meddle, and perhaps muddle, and I had to tell her. I wish she hadn’t been spying. Is everything turning upside down?’ She stamped her foot. ‘It shall not!’

Then she went to a cabinet, and from it helped herself to some sal volatile, and set her teeth against the shadows. She laughed at them.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. DRIPPER WITH A WHISPER FIRES THE
BULWARK.

WAS Socrates the serene-tempered benedict he is represented to be, think you? Not he! Xantippe was chosen as an escort that she might serve for a practical infallible illustration of the power of mind over matter, its combat and prevail. Probably when she raged, he calmly smiled; when she stamped and gnashed, he hummed a tune; when she burst into tears with aggravation, he gave the soft answer that 'turneth away wrath'; not because of an in-born tranquillity of temperament, for the flame of passion leaped at his heart, but because of his resolution to quench that flame, to gain that ascendancy over self which the inspired father of philosophy hath said is greater than the victory of him who storms and conquers a city.

Sweetness of temper is a passive quality,

for it exists without an effort of our own, but the power to subjugate a fiery one must be the greater endowment. Socrates, with the lion within him crouching before the iron rod of Will, presented example in preference to precept ; it was part of his doctrinal wisdom.

Perhaps there was much of Socrates in our hero, Roland Goldwin, compelling him to behave as he had to one who was of the Xantippe order of women ; but since that scene with her in his study, her confession of theft, her duplicity, her stern and—as it seemed to him—unreasonable antagonism to his engagement to Jessie, though he was ready to forgive her unjust accusations and that trickery which she had called ‘zeal,’ he could not reconcile himself just yet to meeting her on the same footing as hitherto—could not address her with the same studied respect. Owing to this he decided to quit Goolgun for a few days, but, to avoid the possible veto from his mother to do so, went without previous intimation to her of this intention. His plan was to recruit himself at Wondoo, to give ample time to Mr. Lockstud to come to a decision upon the momentous question, and to shape his future definitely accordingly, for at present it depended upon that decision.

At Wondoo his depression seemed to vanish ; its freedom from city crush, its verdure, its rustic aspects, gardens, berry hedges, and the purity of its air, wooed him for peace ; and then, Jessie's endearing, clinging ways were to him sweeter than before. Her mother's welcome to him, her gentle voice, and maternal-like glances of happy satisfaction and trust—all unknown at Goolgun—were balsam to his wounds.

The undisguised devotion of these two women to his interests and pleasures was so much lotus fruit—so acceptable to his palate, so delicious in its results. Even that love which Lockstud had maintained would haunt him was temporarily torpid in their comforting presence, so that he was thoroughly grateful, and gratitude and friendship coloured his words and actions so highly that they seemed to have all the ardency of tender passion.

Lockstud's letter reached him, and was discussed with all its pros and cons. Mrs. Lockstud alluded to it as a concession, considering the obstinacy of the individual conceding ; Jessie protested, and said it was positively absurd, an exaction ; but Roland was not entirely dissatisfied, though Mrs. Lockstud's view of 'concession' and her husband's tardiness even in this advance towards him were not

complimentary, and did pique him to a certain extent, yet, turning the matter over in his own mind, he was not so ready to condemn Mr. Lockstud as he had been. After all, when a father wishes to put a would-be son-in-law to a test of his fidelity, believing he has not fully recovered from his position of a rejected suitor elsewhere, and, moreover, that his affections are far from free, the would-be son-in-law has no right to make objections. Of course, Roland could not produce this reasoning to Jessie or her mother to palliate the father's seeming inflexibility of disposition ; he could not say : ' Mr. Lockstud believes my love for Jessie too shallow, too weak to support the vow I have made to be true to her, and knows my first love is not yet entirely put away.' What he did say was : ' Don't judge him rashly, Mid ; he is not so indifferent to your happiness as you imagine. He spoke of you to me with such tenderness that I am assured he could never be tyrannical, even if exacting, as in this case. You know we always esteem most the things that are dearly purchased, and he thinks to enhance your value in my eyes by raising obstacles. He holds you worth waiting for. Laban was unkind to Jacob.'

Jessie was not so easily reconciled. The

prospect of a whole year's separation filled her heart with dismay and her eyes with tears. If she had but read his mind aright, she would have known that he was longing to be up and away, that he might the better fight down the old love, and give her a free and full affection.

The hope of doing this lightened his spirit ; for a time he was the hearty, cheery Roland once more, planning picnic parties and drives, and a whole day at the wonderful Karwoi Falls, to fill up his few days' holiday at Wondoo. But holiday and pleasure-seeking were nipped in the bud, for the day after his arrival Mrs. Lockstud received such a letter from her husband that she smiled and cried over it, and treasured it like a rare gem. It begged of her to return to him without delay, as the house was so lonely, and he could stand it no longer ; her absence was oppressive.

Lockstud never indulged in sentiment—seldom displayed tenderness ; no wonder his wife was touched, and prepared eagerly for departure. A peremptory summons would have recalled her quickly, and without any attempt to show reluctance ; but a tender word such as here conveyed lent wings, in a sense, to her desire to obey him. Her daughter rebelled

slightly at being taken from Wondoo just the week of Roland's coming, but gave in at length with that virtue born of necessity.

Roland returned with them to Phillipia in the full belief that his destiny was fixed, and feeling more settled than he had done for some time. To say he was not entirely dissatisfied with the thought of a year's travelling scarcely conveys the feeling that predominated with him in viewing this coming episode in his life. One time he had anticipated a voyage, with Una by his side, to Knutsford, and thence to Europe and America. Now, a change coming over the spirit of his dream, he was anxious to avoid Una, and he was honest enough to tell himself that he hailed one year's absence from home and surroundings with a content that was but the outcome of this weakness.

The long talks and walks with her which had been his delight were of the past, while a certain constraint had arisen between them which made their inevitable meetings at Cecil-lambda and elsewhere not all pleasant to him, the reserve being far more on his side than hers. Jessie's society (fond of her as he was, and grateful, too, for that woman's worship, which must be as sacred as incense to the reverential man) did not suffice him, was not

such an opposing force as it should have been were her influence stronger ; and again he was forced to admit, after a faithful self-analysis, that he was not above the foibles of his brethren ; and it was Mountfu who prompted the analysis.

He looked upon him as a successful rival, and at present experienced the grip of the 'green-eyed monster' whenever he saw him hovering about Una, or heard him singing with her. Reason how he would that this was wrong, the sensation of bitterness remained. 'Absence will surely cure me,' he confidently decided.

However, there is no sequel to show that this theory was ever substantiated in his case, since that 'destiny which controls our ends' was working up slowly and surely to a crisis about him, while he in his present mood was passive with the blindness of the undeveloped bird in the shell—a shell which by a series of desperate pecks he was doomed to crack and pierce very soon that he might emerge to the light.

There were two people yet to be told of his engagement ; first and foremost Mrs. Calliport, who, of course, had a right to know of all the inner and outer currents which affected her nephew's family for better or for worse ; next,

Mrs. Dripper, for whom both Roland and Jessie entertained some affection and much respect, won by her fondness for her foster-son. Through their desire to take Mrs. Dripper into confidence, Roland broke the shell and fainted before the light.

With Mrs. Calliport all was so sunny that there seemed no prospect of a leaden cloud, which, 'no bigger than a man's hand,' was all the same ascending to wax great and descend.

She received Jessie and Roland only the evening of their return from Wondoo—received them with delight, though she knew nothing of their betrothal, for naturally she had missed Jessie greatly, and her kindly old face had welcome written upon it in every line, and beaming in her keen but tender eyes.

To see Roland with Jessie told her nothing, for it was no new thing for them to visit her together; but to see Jessie's features not drawn as she had seen them last—to see her healthy, rosy and round—was such a joy and surprise that she at once associated the change, not with Wondoo, but with the young man at her side. She not only stood up as they entered her room, but advanced to meet them, and then, with a welcoming hand given to each, she cast a quick glance of inquiry, first on Jessie,

and next on Roland. Jessie, thoroughly understanding, and in the fulness of her ecstasy, cried out :

‘Yes, yes, auntie dear, it is quite true ; we are engaged.’ Her cheeks dimpled in smiles, and her eyes sent out a saucy flash, which said : ‘You see how mistaken you were ; he does love me, after all.’

Aunt Jessie’s arms immediately encircled her beloved niece, and her voice, tender and shaking, breathed lowly an emphatic—

‘My darling ! my darling !’

Next she turned to Roland, and, too overcome for reserve, she kissed him gently on the forehead, and said :

‘You are worthy of each other.’

Here was one, at any rate, thought Roland, ready to smile on their union.

But Mrs. Calliport was not so ready to smile when they told her that, saving for a few, the betrothal was to remain under the rose for a year, and would separate the lovers.

‘Depend upon it,’ she said, in answer to Jessie’s pouting protest, ‘your father has some excellent motive for keeping it private.’

But in her own mind she thought it unnecessary, and went back to her conversation with Theo and his anxiety that Roland should travel.

Now that Roland had declared his love for their Jessie, why should he be banished? She was to know in time.

In the meanwhile Jessie, confident in the permanency of her happiness, felt that much remained to be thankful for, and half wept, half cried, in her excitement that happy hour with Aunt Jessie; she could not help contrasting it with that morning some months ago when, in this very room, and while at her aunt's knee, her love's young dream had been rudely scared away. Poor Jessie! poor faithful heart! Later on, and in accordance with pre-arrangement, Roland knocked at Mrs. Dripper's door for admission, and Jessie, in her own room, was saying to herself:

‘He is going to Mrs. Dripper now—the dear old thing! how she will cry over him and bless him. I think she has always liked me.’

Mrs. Dripper had her suite of rooms—in truth, she had everything her heart could desire but the one thing needful to sweeten possession, and that was a peaceful conscience. But for this startling defect in her life she could have been thoroughly happy instead of being tormented; for, like a female Damocles, she always saw a sword hanging above her head, and now more than ever dreaded its fall, since

Mrs. Goldwin had told her of her foster-son's engagement.

Roland occasionally paid her a visit, but not often ; yet he liked to do her honour, and she, if expecting him, would give her little sitting-room a few extra touches for his reception. It was adorned with many trifles, too, of his own donation, and here, when her duties as house-keeper were over for the day, she sat at her sewing or reading. She did not expect him this night, and it was almost late enough for her to think of retiring, yet she remained at a square centre-table, where some work was lying neglected side by side with a late novel. Evidently she had tried to occupy herself with both in turn, but had failed. She sat with her elbows on the table, and her thin hands locked, while unheeded tears slowly chased each other down her worn cheeks.

Roland's tap at the door and accompanying words, 'Any admission?' made her rise hastily and clear the mist from her sight. It startled her that he should come just that minute, for his image was in her mind's eye, and for him she had been weeping. To see him standing before her in the flesh was not to soothe her distress.

'You're welcome, sir ; come in,' she said, trying to look unconcerned, but failing.

‘It is rather late,’ began Roland, ‘but I won’t keep you long.’ He did not sit down, but stood with his hands in his pockets as he faced her. ‘It is only fair to tell you what has taken place. Behold me, bridegroom-elect!’

Mrs. Dripper turned her head away; she did more than that—she slipped back on to her chair, by which she had been standing, and bent herself forward on the table as if in pain, and with her hands over her face.

Roland was all sympathy immediately.

‘What is it? You are ill. Shall I get you something?’

Mrs. Dripper, incapable of will-power ever, at this sobbed audibly behind her hands:

‘No—no, Master Roland! I’m well enough, but don’t mind me!’

‘Then you must be in trouble,’ he persisted.

‘Yes, in trouble.’ Then she thought to satisfy him with a reason, and said: ‘You—you are going away from us.’

‘Ah! mother has told you—forestalled me. But why tears? I am coming back again, I hope.’

Mrs. Dripper struggled for composure; she ventured to look up into the dear, honest eyes, bent kindly upon her. One of his hands rested

on the table now, quite near her, and she put out one of her own and covered it.

‘I can’t help it,’ she said; ‘it is dreadful to think of you going so far away.’

She spoke as if in apology.

‘Then you know why I am going, of course,’ said Roland, half sitting on the table and beginning to swing a hanging leg.

‘Yes, yes; I know.’

Mrs. Dripper’s voice was sepulchral, her aspect all dejection.

‘You are not hurt with me for not telling you before, are you? because I couldn’t very well. The engagement has only been looked upon as a settled thing since I went to Wondoo, and——’

‘Hurt with you, Master Roland! Lord love you! you never said one word or did one thing in your whole blessed life to hurt me,’ she quite vehemently interrupted, with choking accents.

‘You’re a good soul, or you wouldn’t say that after all the trouble I must have cost you. But I was going to say the engagement is only to be known amongst ourselves—that is all. Dear little Mid and I will be married in one year hence, and then there will be an end to secrecy.’

Mrs. Dripper covered her eyes again, and said nothing. Roland, with his leg dangling, looked upon his foster-mother's acceptance of the fact of his engagement as peculiar, if not annoying.

'Surely,' he thought, 'she is not going to moan over my choice like my mother?'

'You know Mid as well as I do,' he began as a test, 'and will accord her the praise she deserves.'

'I shall always be fond of her, Master Roland; but——'

'Well,' he said, with rising impatience, 'go on.'

'I'd lay down my life this minute to know you were not wishing to marry her. I can't help saying it; don't be angry with me.'

He was angry; he frowned and rose from the table.

'Good-night,' he said loftily, and making for the door.

'Oh, stop, Master Roland!' she cried out in alarm, 'and shake hands with me.'

He walked back to her, and bent over her chair-back.

'Are you against me, too, like my mother?' he asked, 'like Mr. Lockstud? They have both done their best to make me break faith with Jessie, and have failed. Do you think you, as my mother's tool, will succeed?'

‘Ah, dear Master Roland!’ pleaded the poor woman, ‘they are your friends; be advised by them. I know more than you do—I who, loving you so, should advise you, too, but must not speak.’ She rose and faced him as she said this, with her woe-begone countenance, and with her trembling hands on his arm. ‘They have been treating you harsh; your mother don’t tell me everything as she should. I want to move you by love alone—you, the child I have nursed! It ain’t for me to advise you, perhaps; but I’ve seen you grow from the day you came to these arms, a wee, helpless thing, and I only want to serve you. Oh! why are you not engaged to the dear young lady we always thought you sweet on?’ Mrs. Dripper, in her earnestness and grief, said more than she had intended, and repented. ‘Forgive me, sir! I meant no harm,’ she added quickly, seeing Roland’s annoyance.

‘I infer from your words that you have been told a great deal more than was necessary!’ he answered hotly, fully believing his mother had even informed her of Una’s rejection.

‘Only of your engagement to Miss Lockstud,’ she affirmed, with her hands still on him—‘your intention to marry her.’

‘And of her unreasonable aversion to one of

the most womanly of women,' he added. 'You speak the words she has put into your mouth. I will not blame you now, but I will if, after what I have said, you persist in taking up the croak. I will have my way in this matter, understand.'

He spoke with such a quiet determination that Mrs. Dripper's face became rigid; she dropped her hold on him, and reseated herself at the table, with palms at her aching head, and her thin fingers arched and clutching at her hair as though they were talons ready to tear it from the roots. She was convinced now that he was passionately in love with Miss Lockstud, that she had erred in thinking him attached to somebody else. Such opposition as this could only come from a man who loved the girl he sought with all the strength of a man's first ardour. She could not bear it; it maddened her to know he was to be sent away that he might be fooled and crushed when he should return. Why should he not be told at once that such a marriage would be impossible, and then let him go to wear off his pain and disappointment? Why should Miss Lockstud be allowed to consider herself his future wife? Mrs. Goldwin had not told her of the Lannager card she meant to play as a trump.

‘Lord! Lord!’ she cried in her heart, ‘make him listen to me—turn him from this girl!’

Her attitude of misery and evident bitterness of spirit sank deeper than her words in their effect on her foster-son. He had counted upon her appreciation of his suit, on seeing her eyes light up and hearing a blessing murmured. Seeing her thus recalled his mother’s vehement ‘Never! never! never!’ when he spoke of his future alliance to Jessie, her swoon, and subsequently Lockstud’s unwillingness to give way to acceptance. Mrs. Dripper’s reception of his stern assertion of will threw a sickly dim light on the united action of those two, revealing no details, yet something hobgoblin in shape—something to be attacked, thrown down, exposed; something he was resolved to fight. He put his hand on her shoulder, and said earnestly :

‘Tell me—you desire to befriend me, I know—tell me what you know, for you certainly must have some reason for behaving in this incomprehensible way. I ask for joy-bells, and you ring a death-toll over me. For heaven’s sake, what have you to say against a young lady whom you have professed to like?’

‘Nothing, sir—nothing. I am fond of her’—Mrs. Dripper lifted her head for a second-- ‘I

would spare her trouble, and you ; for that I say, Go away and forget her, and let her forget you—it is the only way, Master Roland ; don't come back after your travels and find you've been gulled. She can never be your wife, so help me, God !

Her head went down on her hands again, and she shook from head to foot. She had said it.

He lifted his hand from her shoulder, and turned the colour of death.

'What mystery lies here?' he inquired, moved to an agitation almost equal with her own. 'There is a meaning in your words to which I am blind, but shall not be so long. I desire you to make it plain. Speak !'

Hamlet himself could not have uttered that 'Speak !' with more pathos, more entreaty, when his father's ghost confronted him and promised 'a tale to unfold.' 'Speak !'

Mrs. Dripper did not speak in the way he wished. She clutched at her hair again.

'I have told you all I can ; don't ask me for more. You will kill me ! Go now, Master Roland—be satisfied.'

Roland had so much intention of obeying that he took a seat exactly opposite to her, and, leaning forward, said :

‘Do you think I am a fool? Do you understand that my word is pledged to Jessie Lockstud? that were I to break that word, through being frightened into it, she would be the worst sufferer of all? You want me to break her heart between you. You, whose tenderness I expected—you, for whom I have planned a corner and an easy-chair at my hearth, whom my children—should they ever come—shall honour ever as their father’s faithful nurse and friend.’

Mrs. Dripper tried to look at him, but the tears now came thick and strong to stream down her cheeks. She could not utter a word.

‘Do you think after what you have said,’ he continued, ‘that I shall submit quietly to the imposition her father would put upon me? Certainly his ways are dark. I never understood him, and never shall; but he shall understand that I am not a piece of clay in his hands.’

‘There’s a lot we can’t understand,’ sobbed Mrs. Dripper, longing to escape from his questioning, ‘best not understood. It is best you should know no more—best even to break that poor girl’s heart; but worst—worst for me to trouble you with reasons. You were always a

good, obedient lad, Master Roland; for the love of heaven, for the love of peace, and if you love me, don't—*don't* ask me to tell you more!

Roland, mystified, wretched, for a moment debated whether obedience was discretion, whether he should cease to trouble the miserable woman before him, or worm the truth from his mother. Only for a moment. The thought of the fool's paradise that was being created for the poor girl, whom he was so anxious to protect, urged him to a diplomatic move.

'I promise you, if you tell me all, nobody shall know the name of my informant,' he said.

Mrs. Dripper, drooping her head, shook it sadly and obstinately.

'Very well,' he went on, assuming offence, and rising as if to leave her, 'I will not trouble you any more; but I must tell you before I go that, as I have quite made up my mind to find out everything, I shall tell my mother you have told me everything.'

He scarcely anticipated such a sharp and immediate effect to follow his ruse.

She turned upon him suddenly in anger, and, with eyes expressing fear and defiance:

‘You will tell a lie! I’ve been worked up to say more than I ought, and you take advantage of me! I ask you to let this engagement go—ask it for your own sake—for the love I bear you, and you will have me murdered by Mrs. Goldwin because you are not satisfied. She *will* murder me if she knows I have said as much as I have!’ She began to rock herself in agony, and gasped: ‘You are worse than Eve with wanting what isn’t good for you! You will bring down misery upon yourself and everybody. You will tell a lie!’

He stood over her chair and looked down upon her bent grizzled head, her thin veiny hands clasped in despair, her rocking body, with an infinite compassion which his manner belied.

‘I am in a network of lies; foster-mother, there can be no sin in resorting to a single one to cut through the net; but the lie will be yours as much as mine, for you can save me from the sin of it, if you will. Any way, I shall know everything sooner or later.’

‘O Lord! dear Lord!’ The rocking was wilder—‘I am undone—undone! My sin has found me out in my old age.’

The unhappy Mrs. Dripper now fell on her knees and prayed in dumb anguish; her wan

face uplifted, her hands locked. She was at bay.

Roland turned away, unwilling to witness her abject despair, to disturb her appeal ; but, burning to know the meaning of it all, the poor fellow, worked with conflicting sentiments—amongst which a hot indignation against his mother and Lockstud was paramount—walked away to the end of the room, folded his arms over a heart that was beating wildly, and tried to think what he should say next to induce Mrs. Dripper to be done with mystery.

She saved him that much exertion of thought, for before he was aware of it she stood at his elbow ; she had caught at his arm ; she was saying something in his ear that fell there like molten lead, that paralyzed his senses, made the room swim, and brought a transient oblivion of all things.

‘ For God’s sake, for yours, for mine, don’t let on to Miss Jessie,’ she whispered, ‘ to Mrs. Goldwin, or Mr. Lockstud, that I have told you—that you know ! You are ’—she paused, she gulped, she trembled— ‘ YOU ARE A LOCKSTUD ! ’

CHAPTER XIV.

CECIL LOCKSTUD.

‘YOU ARE A LOCKSTUD!’

The terrible whisper, like a hissing tongue of flame, just touched Roland's brain—only touched it as yet; for, unable to realize the full sense of Mrs. Dripper's words, he recoiled from her hold on him, and said severely:

‘Woman, you are mad to tell me this! You must be mad!’

Nevertheless, the phantom, the hobgoblin, the something intangible that he had determined to fight, was assuming a ghastly aspect, formidable proportions, and was approaching him as a ruthless gaunt glacier, not to be attacked, but attacking.

The woman fell on her knees for the second time, but now as if in appeal to him, and not to a higher tribunal. She crouched at his feet and hid her face.

‘Oh, dear Master Roland, forgive me! I have done a wrong, I have sinned, but be merciful to me! I speak God’s truth: You are—yes, you *are* a Lockstud!’

He looked down upon the crouching figure in speechless agony; a choking, swelling sensation at his throat made him clutch at his collar and tie to loosen both; the veins corded about his temples with the rush of blood there, which, suddenly retreating, left his face with the petrified look of the statue—marble white and rigid.

‘Not—not the child of Jeremiah Goldwin?’ he managed to articulate, but so strangely that Mrs. Dripper, with a new terror, started to her feet and grasped at his hands, hanging helplessly at his sides, as she exclaimed:

‘For God’s sake, don’t look like that, sir!’

‘Answer,’ he said, just in the same way.

And Mrs. Dripper, still holding his two hands in hers, replied:

‘Not the child of Jeremiah Goldwin, but a Lockstud!’

Then followed from him a swift, wild interrogation in but two words:

‘My mother?’

‘Oh, don’t be thinking *that*, sir! Don’t make bad worse,’ she cried out at once, under-

standing him, and beginning to rub his hands between her own to coax them to natural warmth, as she had often done when he, an infant, had lain in her arms. 'Don't be making bad worse. Your mother is one of God's sweetest, best creatures. You are a lawful-born Lockstud—Cecil Lockstud, her firstborn—and not a Goldwin at all!'

'And not a Goldwin at all!' he repeated, like a child imitates its teacher and tries to fix a line in its mind without full comprehension of the meaning.

He allowed her to rub his hands, not knowing what she was doing, and would have fallen but that she was near, and half dragged, half pushed him on to a sofa. Then came kindly oblivion. His eyes closed, his head went back, and darkness fell upon him for a time.

A pungent scent at his nostrils, water trickling over his face, and even escaping in ticklish drops down his neck, his head pillowed on Mrs. Dripper's arm, he struggled back to life and misery, to see her bending over him, to feel her hot breath on his face, as she gave quick gasps.

Not fully conscious, he moved his head wearily, and asked, 'What has happened?' and next tried to rise, but, experiencing a sensation

of giddiness so new to him, he was glad to obey Mrs. Dripper's order :

‘ Please keep quiet, sir. You will be better presently, dear. Keep quiet, now, do.’

‘ But what has happened ?’ he asked again, now querulously.

‘ You’ve been scared,’ said Mrs. Dripper, crooning over him ; ‘ poor boy, poor boy ! haven’t I been nigh fainting myself ? You forced it from me. Lord have mercy on us ! But there’s no call to fret now, sir ; nobody need ever know that you know—that I have told you—not even Mr. Lockstud or your mother—that is, Mrs. Goldwin, I mean. Everything can go on just the same as before, for, of course, you are still Roland Goldwin, you know. You’re to forget everything I’ve told you, and what harm can touch you then ? Only, dearie, you see now why you must not be Miss Jessie’s lover, don’t you ?’

This latter sentence rang like a keynote in his ear ; the missing chord, jangling, discordant, was touched, the sluggish intellect cleared, as memory came back with a rush that sickened and made him shudder. Suddenly he started to a sitting position, and sat upright on the sofa, unheeding his foster-mother’s ‘ Ah, keep quiet, sir—keep quiet,’ for

he then and there sternly demanded the whole story.

‘I am better,’ he insisted. ‘I *must* hear all—I will hear all!’

‘Not to-night, Master Roland; spare yourself, spare me!’ urged Mrs. Dripper.

‘Now—now at once!’ This peremptorily. ‘I am better, I tell you.’

In proof of which assertion he rose to his feet and walked away a few paces, not with his usual steady carriage, but with a desperate resolution not to give way again, and a face so ghost-like that it alarmed Mrs. Dripper, as he stood opposite to her, and leaned on a chair-back for support, having retraced his steps and but poorly proved his words.

His voice was sharp, his manner authoritative, and he fixed his eyes, now fierce and bloodshot, upon her till she writhed.

‘Go on, I say; tell me everything you know!’ he commanded.

Mrs. Dripper wrung her hands and wept again.

‘Come, come!’ Roland cried impatiently, too sore with the weight of his present misery to be affected by such a thing as a mere woman’s weeping, which at any other time would have overpowered him; ‘if tears can wash out the

wrong, weep; but they won't. I insist on hearing the whole truth. What is my mother—I mean, what is Mrs. Goldwin to me?’

Mrs. Dripper's hands went out to him in supplication.

‘Call her “mother” still, sir. Oh, don't forget that!’

‘What is she to me? I ask!’

‘Nothing by blood; everything by—by policy, I suppose; that's the word I've often heard her use.’

‘What policy?’ Roland shifted from the chair-back to the front, and from sheer weakness was compelled to sit down again. ‘I don't understand; why have I been reared to call her “mother”?’

‘The will, Master Roland—the will has done it all!’

Mrs. Dripper was sitting on the sofa and nervously screwing her apron-corners, with her eyes cast down, unwilling—afraid to meet his.

‘The money is at the bottom of it all, and I wouldn't have breathed a word to you, but you made me. I only wanted to put you off from playing lover in the wrong way. I couldn't bear to think of you and Miss Jessie spooning like lovers, as God knows is wicked and ought to be stopped, and so I tried to set things right,

and never thought you'd know more, and now you do. You've made me betray those who trusted me, and so you ought to keep quiet about it. You have only to give that young lady up; but, of course, you are still Mr. Roland Kovodel Goldwin—still the millionaire.'

Her eyes were never raised, while his were fixed upon her. He was too dazed to view all the intricacies of the position at one comprehensive sweep. His brain was all absorbed in extricating himself from a maze—in trying to conceive the certainty of his relationship to the Lockstuds. He knew the contents of Jeremiah Goldwin's will. Captain Pennacove had once given them to him second-hand at his own request, and he had read them since. But even by the light of this much knowledge he could not yet see the drift of the action which had secured him for its victim.

'Go on,' he said quietly, as Mrs. Dripper paused to draw a deep breath and wipe her red eyes with the crumpled apron-corners; 'go on.'

'Well, sir, Mr. Goldwin did make a most peculiar will. They say he was jealous of his wife; you see, she was very young and very beautiful. If she married again she wasn't to

get a penny, and if the child died she was only to get a hundred a year—to lose Goolgun and everything. Well, her baby sickened and did die, and the only way to keep her hold on the will was to keep it alive. She couldn't do that, so she fastened on you instead, and——'

She ceased abruptly, for Roland vented an exclamation of wrath and pain. His hand pressed his throbbing head, his face was ash-coloured and convulsed, but he was not going to faint again. When his exclamation interrupted Mrs. Dripper it was because a full revelation of the crime had swiftly taken possession of him—because he was beginning to understand much that had once been an enigma to him.

His pupils dilated as he heard, his pulse leaped, his tongue seemed to cleave to his throat, words would not come at his bidding; he could only bow his head in token of his recognition of the sense of what his foster-mother was telling him. And so she continued, now with her head lifted, and showing more composure. She felt sure that the worst was over for him, that her dear boy would rally out of his misery, that all would be as it had been, saving for his broken plight.

'I tried to do my duty, Master Roland—

believe me, I did! I was a poor widow with two children—destitute, sir, quite destitute, but for dear Mrs. Calliport—and then my baby died, and I was appointed to nurse Mrs. Goldwin's baby; and when Mrs. Lockstud's baby was born I thought I was hardy enough to nurse it, too. I had a child to support, remember, and money was tempting. You were two of the sweetest little creatures that ever was, and, what was most strange, were as like as two peas in a pod. I might have been puzzled over you a bit myself, only you were double-jointed; but not puzzled for long, for the other little fellow began to pine—perhaps the poor old father nearly hugged him to death. Any way, he began to pule, and his mother sent for a specialist—not her own doctor—and he shook his head grave as a judge over the child, and looked very solemn, and he stroked his chin and cleared his throat when she asked him if it was serious. He said it *was* serious, very serious; and told her what was the matter; but we couldn't understand all his Latin names—we only knew the child would surely die. And it was then Mrs. Goldwin said to me, "He shall *not* die!" She was very anxious and fidgety about him. I believe she was fond of him; she used to kiss

and cry over him very often when she thought nobody was looking. Mr. Lockstud often used to come to see his boy—*you*, sir—and one day I heard him and her talking in the room next to the nursery after the doctor had seen the baby. She was talking shrilly and loud enough for me to overhear, and I can never forget it, Master Roland. “No, I won’t be ousted by anybody, or crowed over by anybody!” I heard her say. Then Mr. Lockstud said something so low I couldn’t hear it, and she called out, “Let her hear! what odds? She’ll have to be called in to help.” I couldn’t make it out then, but did afterwards. Oh, do remember, sir, I was a poor woman, and money is so tempting to the poor. Mrs. Goldwin began the scheme by letting Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Glade—that was Mrs. Lockstud’s mother, dead long ago—know the child was delicate, and advising another nurse to be procured for it. Oh dear! how angry the ladies were with me for trying to nurse two babies at once! They blamed me for everything, and yet I was well able to do it; it wasn’t my fault, I’m sure. But the upshot of it was that the sick child was sent out of the house. Did I tell you, sir, that Mrs. Lockstud was like to die when you were born, and you had to be nursed from home to

keep the house quiet? Well, that was the beginning of it, you see; and though you were about six weeks younger than the Goldwin baby, you were quite as big as it at this time, because it was sickly; but you weren't too strong-looking, either, so that you were like a pair of twins. Nobody knew the difference, or which was which, so the game was just in her own hands, and the child she sent to Mrs. Lockstud was her own—sent it from her to die in another woman's arms, though she loved it; but she loved the money more. And they bribed me with promises of future comfort—I mean Mr. Lockstud and Mrs. Goldwin—told me I was helping them to do a good action, for the child she kept would be handsomely provided for, and she would be saved from ruin. Mrs. Lockstud would have more children to comfort her, but Mrs. Goldwin never. Would I stand by and see her reduced to poverty, she asked, when I could help to befriend her? It did not seem so very wicked then to me, but it does now, since you have been wanting to marry where you shouldn't; and, of course, it has made me wretched to think of it, and you allowed to think of it for a year. This is a secret now between us, Master Roland, only forgive me for giving you so much pain, for

you see I couldn't help it, and you know I would save you from that.'

Roland made no answer ; he was sitting sideways in his chair, with an arm curled on its back, and his face hidden there. He saw the girl-mother with arms outstretched yearning to clasp her firstborn—saw her smiles, embraces, and fervent kisses spent on a child of no kith or kin, on the child of one who hesitated not to rob her of the joys of motherhood. He saw her again weeping, as mothers do weep over the frail, flower-like forms about to be plucked from their breast.

Oh, cruel bitter wrong! Never to have known her as the mother craved for in all these years—to have given his fidelity and obedience to a vile woman—to lose the father he revered, and gain one to be despised—to be reared in falsehood—to bring shame and desolation to the heart of sweet, innocent Jessie.

Mrs. Dripper went over to his chair ; she laid a hand on his shoulder, and, affected by his grief, began to tremble again, as she said in a choking voice :

'Oh, dear Master Roland, look up and say you forgive me! I know I was all wrong. Forgive me! Give me one kind word and look! Don't, don't fret, sir!'

He threw her hand from his shoulder and stood up. His eyes were hot and dry and tearless, and he averted them as if disinclined to rest them upon her.

‘The serpent did tempt me and I did eat!’ he muttered, in deep but audible accents. ‘Let me get out in the air. I shall choke in this house.’

Mrs. Dropper would not let him go yet; she hung on to his arm and cried out:

‘Not till you say you forgive me—you, the child I nursed and fed! You will soon be stronger and better, able to keep things just as they were with all excepting Miss Jessie. You will see I’ve only been trying to serve you in all this. Say you forgive me!’

According to Mrs. Dropper’s way of thinking, ‘things’ (by which she meant his position as Jeremiah Goldwin’s son and heir) were to be maintained as if he were still in ignorance of his birth. His silence, she believed, was secured; she would be protected from the law which would surely pursue her, in company with the lady and gentleman who had prevailed upon her to become an accessory to their plot, if that plot should be exposed; a condition which was not to be conceived in her mind. It was hard enough for her to have to stand before him

self-confessed and abashed because of the part she had accepted in the conspiracy ; but the pain of it was not so much due to her view of the enormity of the crime as to the fact of its being known to him, and having to explain it with her own lips, compelled by his will to reveal all. He was the soul of honour, and had believed in her own goodness ; it was no light thing for her to be forced to unveil this putrid spot on her life to one whom she loved so dearly, whose estimation she valued. But she had not told him everything—had said not a word as to Lockstud's reasons for sharing in the scheme, though she knew quite well.

She had convinced him that Lockstud was his father, and no more was necessary. She only wished him to be spared the disgrace of looking upon Jessie Lockstud as his future wife, and this she had done, though in a far more decisive way than she had anticipated or desired, through that terrible threat of his to worm the truth from his mother.

The fear of the result of that truth to himself made her go down on her knees and sue for heaven's mercy ; the fear of forfeiting his good opinion and incurring his displeasure made her kneel to him—made her catch at that rag of defence, her widowhood, poverty

and her orphan child impelling her to stoop to bribe ; the fear of it now kept her clinging to his arm and pleading for forgiveness.

But Roland's heart was too wildly beating, too bruised, too angry, to admit softness or pardon.

Without word or look he thrust her from him and staggered out of the room, leaving her to her prayers, lamentations, and futile repentance.

Too weak to rush from the house as he heartily wished, he was fain to throw himself upon his bed, dressed even to his boots, and there lay face downwards, prostrated, too stunned for the relief of tears, too bewildered yet to think or reason, with a brain on fire, and wild bitter thoughts surging at his heart, mocking his misery.

' Ho, ho ! ' they cried, ' so your father is not the good man lying in his grave, but the vile one living, the father of the girl you wanted to marry—the girl who will die, whose life is blasted ! Oh, see the blot on the escutcheon ! You, reared by a felon ! What becomes of all your pet plans—all the acres you will portion out to the hungry men, their anxious wives and helpless little ones ? How will you live ?—how hold up your head ? One word and

you will sweep everything from you. Silence, fool! What matter? Silence, and you are still the millionaire.'

Here Mrs. Dripper's words began to leap, to sting, to yell in his giddy brain, beyond his control to repel or consider :

'You are a Lockstud, but still Roland Kovodel Goldwin, the millionaire. Let this be a secret between us. Everything can go on just the same as before. Nobody need know that you know.'

Oh, how they maddened him! how they screamed like devils! how his soul darkened and fell in that hour! Yet how it struggled again, and tried to escape the evil clutch, the wily serpent—how a wild, heart-broken petition slackened the bond, pierced the darkness, as it broke forth in anguish, 'God in heaven, I am mad! Help! help! help!'

And all this time Mrs. Goldwin was sleeping sweetly, undisturbed by dream or presentiment.

Roland was of age, and would be done with. Jessie, she decided, was to be Mrs. Frank Lannager, and she herself would not depend upon the generosity of her supposed son. Had she not turned her pickings from the estate over in the wonderful Nabob gold mine, through the hands of the manager of the Civic

Bank, whose business acumen was reliable, who had suggested the investment? Could she not have disposed of those shares long ago at an enormous profit and reaped her thousands, but for her long-headed adviser assuring her they would go up higher, and with a run?

She was waiting confidently for this run; she was a young woman yet, and perhaps happier days were in store for her when she would cease to be Mrs. Goldwin. She hated the name associated so long with strategy and anxiety; she did not love the young man who bore it. The one affection of her life she had tampered with, and when she thought of him who had won it she told herself it had turned sour—that she sometimes hated him. But at this juncture, satisfied that her designs would advance successfully and end suspense, she was happier than she had been for years, and decided to go abroad at no distant date, and to forget Lockstud if she could. A rich, handsome widow in her prime would have no difficulty in losing the name she loathed.

It did not startle her when Roland failed to appear at the breakfast-table the next morning. Of late his habits had lost their method, his manner to her its customary deference. She was better pleased to be rid of his presence;

but she was not to enjoy this sweet content for long, and Jack Lockstud it was who led the way to her disturbance. His sister Jessie, who was constantly despatching tender little billets-doux by post or otherwise to Roland, had begged him to be her postman before he went to the bank: said she had forgotten to tell Roland something the night previous through being at Aunt Jessie's, and had written it that morning. So Jack, ready to tease and ready to please her, bore the letter away and entered Goolgun.

Mrs. Goldwin was surprised when he was ushered into the breakfast parlour at that hour.

‘Anything wrong at home, Jack?’

‘Don’t be alarmed, Mrs. Goldwin,’ he laughed. ‘Nobody’s born, dead, or married. Only Jessie discovered this morning that she hadn’t time to tell Roland all she had to tell last night. I have the important sequel here;’ he slapped his breast-pocket.

‘Oh, is that all?’ Mrs. Goldwin was relieved at once.

‘Where’s Rol, the lazy fellow?’ asked Jack, concluding that he had not yet risen.

‘Somewhere in the house, I suppose,’ she replied. ‘Millionaires have a license. Possibly he has ordered his breakfast in bed, possibly he

has overslept himself' — she shrugged her shoulders. 'I never trouble him with questions; he is his own master now.'

'Living on love,' said Jack, who had been told of the secret betrothal.

'Perhaps so.' Mrs. Goldwin smiled strangely. 'Have you breakfasted? Come and join me; see how lonely I am.'

'Can't put away two breakfasts within an hour,' said the lad, with a laugh. 'Wish I could, to oblige you; but I must hurry. May I run upstairs and deliver this to Mr. Lazy-bones?'

'Certainly. I shouldn't wonder but what you'll find him at breakfast too.'

As Jack in his hoydenish youth and with a swinging gait turned from her, and she heard him ascending the staircase three steps at a time, she thought:

'No danger *there* from resemblance; they're so unlike.'

Jack found Roland's door locked when he tried to push it open unceremoniously; so he knocked.

'Who's that?' from within.

'Me,' said Jack, careless of his grammar.

There was a movement, a shuffle, and that thud across the bedroom floor which comes

from bootless feet, and then the lock clicked, and Roland, with a dressing-gown folded about him and in stockinged feet, stood spectre-like before his early visitor, who had banter on his tongue and mirth in his eyes until he saw Roland's face.

'Gemini Maria!' he ejaculated; 'what's o'clock? Why, you're ill—I'm blessed if you ain't!'

'Come inside, Jack, and close the door. I—I have had a bad night.'

Roland went back to the chair from whence he had just risen and dropped on to it.

'A bad night—ten bad nights you look like. What shall I tell little Juliet at home of her sick Romeo? I believe you want your breakfast. Oh, come, I say, don't do that!' This latter sentence was tacked on owing to Roland at that moment dropping his face on his hands, to a wild irrepressible sob that went straight to Jack's sympathetic heart. 'Don't do that--don't cave in! How is it you feel? Perhaps it's that confounded typhoid you think you've got; but you haven't, you know. A doctor will settle it.'

Roland raised his head again; there were big tears in his eyes, an invisible clutch at his throat, yet he tried to speak calmly:

‘Don’t say anything to poor little Mid. I am quite well.’

‘Yes, and dancing a jig,’ quoth Jack, his boyish face reflecting all the misery of Roland’s. ‘Anything else?’

‘Yes, anything but the truth just yet. Come here, Jack.’

Jack went closer to him, and stood by his chair as if expecting to hear something more.

‘Listen,’ went on Roland; ‘I am *not* ill; you will tell the truth in that—not ill in the way you fear. But I have suffered, and am suffering; yet I shall get through it. But we are made of such poor stuff, Jack, that’s all—such poor stuff. I have had a blow, dear old chap; don’t ask me now what it is, and tell Mid I am well, and——’

‘What about this first?’ interrupted Jack, just remembering to give up Jessie’s letter, since Roland’s apparent distress had nearly made him forget it.

Roland opened the little scented, pale-pink missive, which was only to say that she and mamma were expecting some friends that day, and when she made an appointment to meet him in the gardens with Una that same afternoon, she had quite forgotten this, so would defer it till the next day, much to her own

regret and disappointment ; and prayed he was well, and remained his fond, devoted, etc. It is unkind to tell all she did say, or to expose the inevitable P.S.—a mere excuse for another love-message. Roland opened it with shaking fingers, and when read, crumpled it up in his palm and let it fall from his hand as though it were a live coal.

‘It needs no written answer,’ he said, looking up into Jack’s face, which was full of pity and wonderment. ‘But, like a good fellow’—here he drew a note from his own pocket, sealed and addressed, even stamped—‘you will give this to your father for me. I meant to post it, but he will get it sooner through you. It is on important business, and I trust it to your keeping. Now go ; you will find me quite well when you see me again.’

‘But——’

‘You will be late at the bank.’

‘I’ll be back here as soon as I can,’ said Jack, not satisfied.

He went downstairs very differently to the way he had run up, and met Mrs. Goldwin in the hall.

‘Well,’ she said lightly, ‘did you find my lord at his breakfast?’

‘He looks as if he was never going to eat

anything again. He won't tell me what's the matter. I suppose he hasn't told anybody ; but I think you ought to make him swallow something. Good-morning, Mrs. Goldwin.' Jack lifted his hat and was gone.

'Going to be ill, is he?' thought Mrs. Goldwin, not so uneasy about his health now as she had been. 'Pshaw! men are such cowards over the prick of a pin. He is bilious, most likely, but I suppose I must continue the rôle of anxious mother, and ought to go to him.' So debating, she mounted the stairs and stood at his door.

'Can I come in?' she asked ; but receiving no answer, pushed open the door, which had not been locked on Jack's exit, and saw Roland just as Jack had left him, with his head bowed on his hands. 'Surely you are not too ill to answer,' she said a little impatiently. 'Jack has gone away thinking you are dying.'

The word 'dying' roused him ; he dropped his hands and looked at her. His face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot and sunken, yet full of withering scorn. She was quite as alarmed as Jack, but from a different cause, and in that moment experienced the weird sensation which visits all at odd times, and for which eager penetrating science cannot yet

account, and never will. It was the sudden and strange memory of that same scene having passed before her at some previous time of her existence. She started and shivered, and seemed to know exactly what he was going to say—what would happen next. Before she could ask, ‘What is the matter?’ he took up the word ‘dying’ like a clue.

‘Dying!’ he cried, in a hoarse guttural whisper, but with every word rounded distinct and dangerous as shot. ‘Yes, Roland Kovodel Goldwin is dead; he died last night.’

He glared at her, and she stared at him with eyes starting from their sockets. She went up closer to him; her heart stood still with terror; she put out a couple of fingers to lay them on his pulse; she tried to say, ‘This is fever—you are delirious!’ but could not. And he, shrinking from contact with her, rose quickly from his chair to fall back out of reach of those fingers, and said:

‘Touch me on your peril! Through you I am defiled—through you, a thief and now a beggar—you, who can be nothing but what is vile in my sight—in the sight of CECIL LOCKSTUD!’

She put out both her hands as though suddenly smitten with blindness, as if groping

in the dark, tottered forward, vented a stifled moan like the cry of one strangling, and dropped at his feet.

Once again in her life Isabella Goldwin fell before him—fell unconscious.

CHAPTER XV.

FATHER AND SON.

WHILE Mrs. Goldwin was engaged at her breakfast, and unassailed by the shadow which is said to be cast by the coming event, three persons of her acquaintance, not so far away, were occupied with theirs; they were Captain Pennacove, his niece, and his guest, Mr. Larry, who had returned early that morning from his peregrinations.

Washington Larry's face was as radiant as a face of its kind could be; not because he was with his friends again—though that was a pleasure—but because of that happy self-appreciation founded on the expressed appreciation of others.

Una had welcomed him with real gladness, had pressed his old yellow hands in her fair, slender ones, had poured out earnest thanks for his kind remembrance, had lauded his

generosity, his excellent taste; and Larry, although he could not honestly accept her praise for 'excellent taste,' as he was indebted to Roland for the selection of books, felt there was something worth living for, since he could contribute in any way to this young lady's happiness, for he looked upon her as distinct from a sex for which he had no respect. But he thought she appeared delicate, and said to himself:

'She's paler and thinner. Too much pianner, or Greek and Latin stuff.'

When the day was a little older he hinted to her this much, and asked if she were feeling well.

'Oh yes, perfectly well,' she replied laughingly; 'only you have seen some rosy-cheeked Hobart girls, and think me pale by contrast. Why should I not be well?'

'Why should I not be well?' she asked her own heart later on, when afternoon had come, and she sat at her books in her room, with a pencil in her fingers, and its point wedged between her white teeth. She sat in thought, not in study, as the pencil pointing its wrong end outward might testify, for she was reflecting upon Larry's question: 'Are you well? You're not as rosy as I left you,' and

certain proceedings of the evening previous, when Jessie and Roland had surprised her with a hurried visit before they went to Mrs. Calliport to tell her of their engagement and its secrecy, for Jessie had not found time to write of it, owing to the sudden return to Phillipia, of which Una was only apprised by seeing her that evening.

‘Isn’t it absurd?’ said rebellious Jessie. ‘We are engaged and mustn’t speak of it, or whisper it, because pa thinks Rol doesn’t know his own mind, I suppose, and has such an opinion of me that he believes I might be eclipsed by some other girl. We are both to be put on probation to test our powers of endurance over the contract.’

She tossed her head and displayed unshed tears. Roland, flushing before Una, kept silence for a time and did not follow up this outburst, but turned to the subject of the projected departure, and did not seem bowed down with grief at the thought of the separation; and she, much to her own astonishment, had taken part with ease in the dialogue, and had sent them both away under the impression that she coincided with Mr. Lockstud’s views and was far happier than Jessie.

‘It is better for him to get away,’ she

thought, 'and we will both come out of it strong. I shall be well, and an old maid—a Master of Arts, with lore to compensate for love. I shall find a haven.'

Musing thus, and all abstracted, she scarcely heeded certain sounds that floated about her, believing they came from the street, until she was compelled to recognise a stentorian 'Una, Una girl, come down!' from her uncle. She had left him and Mr. Larry preparing for a *siesta* within cushioned easy-chairs and veiled with handkerchiefs.

'Yes, I'm coming, uncle,' she called out, wondering why she was wanted at that hour, and hastening downstairs. She met her uncle at the foot.

'Go in there and see,' he said in answer to her 'What is it?' and gently pushed her through the dining-room door just at hand.

She entered and saw Roland, who rose and went forward to meet her.

Could it be Roland? Could twenty hours produce such a change? He had left her yesterday with the upright, firm carriage peculiar to him; to-day he was bent, shrunken, broken down, it seemed; his eyes sought hers with a mute appeal in their depths, as if for her protection—her tenderness. Larry

was sitting in his easy-chair, eyeing him ruefully and in silence; the Captain was standing near the door, where Una was also standing, with Roland's cold, clammy hand trembling in her own, with her eyes full of pity and distress.

'Here's a nice how-do-you-do!' began the Captain, with his face redder than usual, and his brows bunched severely. 'Get him something to eat, Una; he's starving—that's what's the matter with him. Stir cook up at once, and begin with wine and biscuit. Here, don't stand, boy. Run, Una! Lord bless my girl! fetch him a bite of something.'

'Starving!' exclaimed Una, as her uncle led Roland by the arm back to his seat on the sofa, and she, full of fear and astonishment, hastened to get the needed refreshment.

When about to bring wine and biscuit on a dainty little tray, her uncle came behind her and tapped her on the shoulder.

'Don't bother him with questions when you take him that,' he said. 'He has had a shindy with the old woman.'

'Quarrelled with Mrs. Goldwin you mean?'

'Something like it. He came in a cab, and walked in here more dead than alive. Larry and me were napping, but his coming in like a broken-masted ship drove the sleep out of us—

took the wind out of the canvas. He just sat down on the sofa, and said, with the ghost of a smile: "Captain, take me in tow for a while! I'm about sinking—I want food and shelter. I know you'll give me both. Give me food, for not another bite will I take inside Goolgun. I'm hungry and weak. Don't ask me any questions yet, for I can't answer them; only be my friend as ever!" So don't teaze the boy with questions. Something has gone wrong with him at home, you may be sure. I'll carry that for you.'

He took the tray up, and he and she went back to the dining-room together to set it before him.

Larry rose and looked at Captain Pennacove so meaningly that the latter followed him outside.

'Leave them alone,' muttered Larry, on the other side of the door. 'Us two old coves will only be in the road. She'll pull him through.'

'Aye, she'll put him in dock for repairs right enough; but what the devil is it all about?'

'It ain't a devil; it's a witch, I'd swear; the yaller-haired witch is at the bottom of it. I know her.'

Roland (as we must still call him from habit)

was grateful for the gentle ministering which followed ; he was glad to recline full-length on the couch, with soft cushions at his head and shoulders, placed there expressly for him ; he sipped the wine and nibbled the biscuit languidly, with every now and again a 'Thank you,' or 'How good you are to me,' and a sorrowful gaze on Una's face, where pity and interrogation were legibly written.

Presently, slightly cheered by the warmth of the wine and few mouthfuls of biscuit, he said :

'You don't ask me why I am here—this way.'

'Because you will tell us of your own accord, I know, when you are stronger.'

'Always thoughtful, Una. Your presence comforts me.'

Una was distressed ; his present dependence upon her was rather hazardous to the haven she thought to enter. She stooped as he spoke to pick up something that had fallen behind the couch, so that when she rose, her colour was heightened for a second, but it passed quickly away.

'Does Jessie know you are ill ?' she asked naturally, and was surprised that he made no answer ; for his head, pressed against the cushion, suddenly turned, giving her a back

view of it, and his eyes closed, but his lips never moved.

She did not repeat the question or speak again—not knowing what to do or say—until he faced her, and she saw tears shining in his eyes; then prudence and reserve were considerably weakened. Full of surmise, she was, as a matter of course, far from touching on the truth; she could only fall back on supposition—could only guess that some misfortune had assailed him; and his tears wrung her heart so much that all the hitherto suppressed tenderness burst its bonds and rushed to her lips:

‘Oh, Rol—Rol! poor fellow! how can I help you?’ Her eyes filled too; her voice quivered.

‘By still being the dear friend, the gentle sister of the past days,’ he answered, with a pitiful break in his accents, and a hand before his eyes. Then with a strange suddenness, he added, ‘I think I could sleep.’

‘So you shall,’ she said, and immediately proceeded to close the blinds and draw the curtains in the room; then: ‘Nobody shall disturb you.’

‘Thank you. Oh! thank you; you are so kind! Come back soon; the wine is in my head, I believe.’

And so, with his murmured thanks following her to the door, she passed through with the softest tread and closed it carefully.

And Roland, ashamed of the tears which would flow, thus secured a desired temporary solitude, and next, giving way to drowsiness, was lulled by the sleep denied him the night previous.

He slept so soundly and so long that the appetizing dish ordered for him especially was in danger of being spoiled—that the dining-room was given up to him, and the host and hostess with their friend Larry had dinner laid elsewhere, and allowed him to sleep on undisturbed.

But Roland, unaware that sleep was to overtake him, as the consequence of food and the feeling of content at being with friends, had not told Una that he expected somebody to meet him at Unaville that afternoon or night; and this somebody came, very much to the surprise of the Pennacoves and the wrath of Washington Larry, when they were about finished with dinner in the drawing-room.

It was no other than Theodore Lockstud, and he came abruptly on them, unaware that he should find them in the drawing-room, being told they were dining, and saying he

would wait until they were finished. So he pushed open the door, never heeding the servant's 'Not in there, sir,' and stood before Roland's friends.

He had not met Washington Larry for over twenty years, yet they recognised each other with a malignant scowl; and Larry got up and left the room; but Lockstud, too intent upon another matter, did not give him a second thought as soon as he was out of his sight.

His manner was peculiar. Always courteous, he was now almost rude—boorish; but his appearance proving that he was really ill caused this breach of etiquette to be overlooked.

His hat remained on his head, and he forgot to say 'Good-evening.' What he did say was: 'Is Goldwin here?' when his eyes, having searched the room, failed to light on him.

There was a note in his pocket, which, like a small electric battery, touched all his nerves and kept them leaping and tingling—stripped him, too, of his gallantry and cold studied civility. How could he think of anything else? It was a pistol at his throat—a rope round his neck. What man can think of polite words and every-day courtesy with an invisible noose under his collar dragging him on perhaps to ignominy and destruction? Roland had hurled

the lasso, and Jack had helped to fix it when he handed his father that note, which ran :

‘Meet me this afternoon or to-night at Unaville. To-day I shall leave Goolgun for ever. I command you to come and hear the reason why. I am ill and dazed.’

It was addressed to Theodore Lockstud, Esq., and signed Roland Goldwin. He scarcely dared to ask himself what it meant, and put off the requested meeting as long as he could fight against the influence impelling him to obey the call.

As soon as he could leave the bank, he went to Goolgun, and asked calmly if he could see Mrs. Goldwin, but was told she had been taken very ill in the morning—that the doctors had seen her, and given orders to admit no visitors, and had prescribed perfect rest.

‘And Mr. Goldwin ; I can see him, of course ?’

‘He was awfully cut up, sir, about the missis, and went out this afternoon for an airing, I suppose ; he may be back soon.’

‘Well, I would like to see Mrs. Dripper ; I have a message to give her particularly.’

‘Oh ! Mrs. Dripper has left Goolgun for

good, sir ; and behaved most shameful—just went out of the house as soon as the missis took so bad, and never went near her !

This from the parlourmaid.

Lockstud's pulse increased ; he stood dumb on the Goolgun threshold—opened his mouth to speak, but said nothing ; then he turned swiftly on his heel, ran down the stone steps, and left the maid staring after him, not favourably impressed with his good-breeding.

‘He might have given a civil thank you,’ she thought.

He turned from the Goolgun doors and walked across the terraces till he came to the fountain, and, standing there, knew not that he covered the very self-same spot where Jerry had fallen headlong—had lain a night through to absorb from the dank dew-filled grass his death potion.

Lockstud bared his head and put out his hands to catch the spray and throw it over his head and face ; and this being done, his teeth began to chatter, and he cursed himself for a fool. ‘Anybody might know the sudden cold would cause a shivering,’ he said ; while he knew it was not the douche that had done it, and turned from the fountain, where the sunbeams were shining and dancing in dazzling

curves of brightness as the glinting willow-like lines of water fell gurgling musically into the basin. He would not go home, and he shirked going to Unaville with the lasso at his throat, yet compelling him to go or be strangled. He sought amusement at the Zoological Gardens, and thought the animals were leering at him; he turned from there and visited the Cyclorama—then on view—representing the battle of Waterloo. The portrayal was perfect—agonizingly perfect to the sensitive spectator, with its smoke and fire and carnage, its faces of the dead and dying, and hard grim realities and terrors of the gory battle-field.

Lockstud sickened at it, and left after a ten minutes' stay; next he went to his club and tried to read a paper—tried to eat his dinner there. One or two asked him if he had been ill; and he told them he had been having a look at the Cyclorama.

'It is infernally life-like,' he declared, with a frown; 'I don't see the use of such harrowing exhibitions.'

He made a pretence of dining, and helped himself rather freely to brandy neat, but he did not stay out all the courses, for his neck seemed to be straining in its yoke; the drag on him was getting stronger, and there was

nothing for him but to go quietly away and submit to the attraction he could not resist.

So he stood at last in the house to which he had been commanded to come, and asked :

‘Is Goldwin here?’

‘Yes,’ blurted out the Captain, ‘he’s here, and all out of gear. What’s up? I suppose you know.’

‘I don’t. Is he ill?’

‘Not exactly ill,’ said Una, ‘but worried over something which he has not told us yet. He is asleep now, and we thought it best not to waken him even for his dinner. Will you join us? We are late, because we waited a while thinking he might wake.’

Lockstud bowed, and said he had dined, but he was glad to take a chair.

There was an eagerness to hear from him whatever he might know relative to Roland’s distress, both on the Captain’s and Una’s side. Lockstud had never set foot in their house since he had been told of their hospitality to Larry; his very visit at that hour, so unexpected, so brusque—his glance round the room in search of Roland, and his question—his blanched face and drawn features, all seemed to point to him as one who did know something.

‘You must know why he is here and not at

home; why he looks like a scarecrow,' said the Captain.

'I know no more than you,' answered Lockstud. 'I've been to Goolgun; the servant told me his mother was ill, and that he was not at home. I—I thought to find him at your place, since he was not at ours, and tell him he *ought not* to be out when she is really bad.'

'Well, you're not looking *AI* yourself,' said Captain Pennacove, who, inclined to hostility, was in a relenting mood this minute towards this unwelcome guest, against whom Larry had hardened him. 'Take something.' He pushed the whisky decanter towards him, and then turned to Una. 'Go and have a peep at the boy, Una; he might be awake by this.' And as she went to do his bidding he continued to Lockstud: 'It strikes me there's been a deuce of a row at home, and that's why she's ill and he is upside down.'

Lockstud, having accepted the offer of whisky, had the decanter in his hand over the glass, and it waved in his grasp as if the room were a rolling ship-saloon, so that the liquor ran down the sides of the glass and on to the snow-white cloth.

Captain Pennacove watched him keenly from under his shaggy brows. 'That fellow *does*

know something,' he decided in his own mind ; but he began to talk of other things, and found converse flag, and that he was getting random replies.

Quite half an hour went by before Una returned to say Roland was awake, and would see Mr. Lockstud, who rose at once and left uncle and niece alone, the former expressing some annoyance at being left so long with 'a fellow like that.'

'I couldn't help it, uncle,' pleaded Una. 'I think Mr. Lockstud knows more than he wishes to tell. Roland was scarcely fit for any exciting interview, so, finding him awake, I got him to eat some dinner first, to get his strength up.'

'Oh, wise little judge!' exclaimed the fond old man, his good humour restored, and with his fingers at her ear ready to pinch. 'You can't spend your wisdom or devotion on a better subject, nor can he think any other devotion so sweet.'

Una reddened painfully and turned away.

He thought the blush a tell-tale, and chuckled at it audibly with a shake of his broad shoulders. He and Larry had married her long ago to Roland over their pipes and the friendly glass.

Then, to put her at her ease again, he asked :

‘Did you see how Larry’s back was up when Lockstud came in—how he sidled out of the room?’

‘I was too much occupied with Mr. Lockstud’s looks to notice Mr. Larry, uncle, and thought he had something to tell us to explain this visit of Rol’s,’ she said.

‘The fellow looked ill enough, and I pitied him for it; but I hate him, all the same.’

The hated one was standing at the dining-room door hesitating before he turned the handle.

Daniel never faltered at the mouth of the lions’ den as Lockstud faltered now! The Duc d’Enghien never quaked and whitened with qualm when marshalled before the line of soldiery to receive that murderous shower of bullets as Lockstud quaked and whitened now!

With a desperate determination to assume a calm exterior, he at length pushed the door and entered, not forgetting to turn the key in the lock before advancing to meet Roland, who stood with arms folded across his breast awaiting him, and somewhat strengthened for the encounter by the long rest and the food just consumed. Nevertheless, Roland was trembling, but made no pretence of hiding his

agitation, as the man who confronted him was struggling to do, yet failing miserably, for his voice shook and his features went awry, as he drew the note from his pocket and tossed it on to the table towards the young man, saying quietly :

‘ Explain that. Believing you demented, I have come, as you wished, if only to take you back to Goolgun. You have set the Pennacoves’ imagination running riot. Now, what does it mean ?’

Contempt and compassion were strangely mingled on Roland’s countenance. It was pitiable to him to hear the man’s assumption of reproach and innocence, and yet to see the fear and wretchedness which could not lie like his words. He could not answer at once, for misery was stifling him. His own father was this, not knowing how much or how little his son knew of their unhappy relations, and sick with suspense so ill-concealed beneath its poor veneer of *sang froid*. He silently scanned him for a few seconds and then, with a thrilling pathos, replied :

‘ You ask what it means ? Can you not guess ? You do guess—nay, guess is not the word—you *know* why I have sent for you ! Your face betrays you—belies your words.

Why deny it? Why more deceit? Did you think to go down to your grave carrying the secret with you—to leave a foul wrong unrighted? No, you shall not! As there is a just God in heaven, so shall He mete out justice to His creatures here. It is for *me*, for Cecil Lockstud, your miserable son, to take up the burden of this duty as He wills it!

The dart sped and pierced. Lockstud made no movement; he simply stared at the note, unable to look Roland in the face. He was certain now that Mrs. Dropper had been playing at Queen's evidence. Why, he knew not. To convict that other woman, Mrs. Goldwin, she being the only one besides in the plot, would be absurd, knowing how much for her depended upon her secrecy. Mrs. Dropper was surely the traitor, and he might have attempted bravado, to swear her statement away, braved much to undo her words, but would not stand deeper polluted before the son who had won his pride and affection.

Love bridled his tongue and preserved his soul from further blackness. It was this well-spring of passionate paternity which, like a strong current, had driven him on, in spite of reluctance, to obey the command in that per-

emptory note, which had tightened the lasso at his throat to drag him to his son's feet, to ultimately capitulate. Suspense gone, pretence fled, and Theodore Lockstud, the father—not the man, not the bank manager, the polite friend—stood crestfallen and abashed.

Powerless as an infant to retort or defend, his head dropped till chin lay on breast.

Roland, scarcely prepared for complete surrender and abject remorse, felt in this supreme moment of agony as if his heart would burst. He was disarmed, unmanned, and all the epithets of scorn which were rising to his lips withered there, never finding utterance. In mute misery, like his father's, he turned and laid his head against the wall and on his arm, and then did as Joseph, when he made himself known to his brethren: he 'raised his voice in weeping.' If iron tears ran down Pluto's cheeks, iron tears gathered now in the elder man's eyes, but he dashed his handkerchief across them and strode to Roland's side; he placed a hand on his shoulder and cried in a hoarse whisper:

'Hush! hush! for God's sake hush! They will hear you.'

'Let all the world hear,' moaned Roland, recklessly impulsive.

‘And damn me!’ said Lockstud, alive to danger as to pain. ‘Calm yourself and listen to what I have to tell.’

‘I am listening.’

‘Not like that,’ groaned Lockstud. ‘How can I speak when you turn from me? How can you heed? Come, let us sit down and have it all out.’

Roland raised a white distorted face, and then, partly led by his father, reached a chair, and with him sat down by the dining-table; but each averted his face from the other, and Roland, elbows on table, held his head in his hands, while Lockstud had thrown himself well back in his chair to aid respiration, which was painful. Then followed a dead silence, and, excepting for the thumping of each man’s heart, not a movement for a minute or so, until Lockstud, struggling to master his weakness and bring forward some defence, commanded his voice sufficiently to speak. He began with a question, and but two words :

‘Your informant?’

‘What matter? I am informed; that’s the main point.’ Roland spoke bitterly.

‘You need not tell me, for I know.’ Lockstud clenched his hand; his voice sounded hollow and far away. ‘I know the traitor in

the camp, where she has thrived and fattened. It is Mrs. Dripper.'

'She was compelled to speak. It is not for you to blame her,' muttered Roland; 'she is no traitor.'

'Then inexorable fate has pursued us all alike,' said Lockstud again, giving forth a hard breath. 'Well, listen, and condemn me if you will. I have been wrong—woefully wrong!'

Roland bowed his head in assent, but kept quiet.

'But the victim of cruel circumstance.'

Roland's mouth here curved slightly with scorn.

'Imagine me a young man—can you?—passionately in love with cruel, selfish Beauty!' continued Lockstud, with a certain passion in his tones, as he referred to his past. 'Or bewitched by a Lorelei—a Lorelei to dash me on the rocks, to destroy me in the end!'

'The woman I have called mother?' Roland interpolated.

'Just so,' said Lockstud frowningly. 'And I believed her love for me as pure and deep as mine for her. What fools men are! It was the old story; her soul cried out for gold before love, and so she tainted mine—she married for gold; I married for consolation, or for pique,

or both. What matter now? She wrote to me, saying I was a fool, and had balked her purpose; she said things that would make your hair stand on end; she dared to affirm that for *my* sake she had married, and I swore to myself that some redress should be mine. I allowed myself to be drawn to her side again, and to be kept chained there. She was beautiful—fascinating, and I was ruled by the power of wealth which was hers—which was to aid me. I told you her gold-lust was infectious; it infected me. A man is not a saint, and so the love once strong was wounded to death, and I turned to gold for a salve and a substitution. For a time I had it. All her wiles could not make me forgive or forget, but I deceived her as she deceived me. Her infatuated husband for her sake then gave me a handsome billet, and I was grateful to him—so grateful that I honoured his name, understand, though she held me her slave and adorer. I honoured him—I pitied him in my heart. But some prying wretch made him think of wrongs perhaps that never existed—tried to ruin her and me. You know him well enough; it was Washington Larry.’ Lockstud breathed the name from between set teeth. Roland started at the mention of it; it explained at once Mrs.

Goldwin's hate. 'Jealous of any creature coming between him and his friend,' went on Lockstud, 'he drove that friend to frenzy, and through him that mad will was drawn—yes, and through him you became Roland Goldwin.'

Roland here raised his head and looked at Lockstud, whose eyes were cast on the table; the look did not imply any acceptance of the circumstance as extenuating.

'Go on!' he said, with a slight ring of contempt which did not escape Lockstud.

'Because,' said Lockstud, with a perceptible writhe, 'I think—we thought—he was already magnificently provided for; and the boy's acknowledged death, if you know anything of the will, would have probably enriched him by one-third of the old man's wealth. There certainly was a question of next-of-kin, but it was looked upon as a mere legal phrase, for Jeremiah Goldwin had not a relative in the world, saving his wife and child. I say again, a man is not a saint, and I was averse to that sneaking Paul Pry being one of the heirs. I likewise felt that something was due to the widow, for she had befriended me, and owing to this I helped her to the fraud. She could not deceive me with the exchange of children, so she made me an accomplice. And with her

I thought I was insuring something great for your future. I was glad to think you would be a millionaire, and with the possibilities of a crowd of children in time to come to compensate my wife for your loss, the wrong did not seem so terrible. Whereas she, the widow, would be stripped of everything, and, moreover, would see the man who hated her thus enriched. I did hint to her that she might marry again—more money, perhaps—that there was more than one idiot in the world to go mad for her yet. To this she replied that she would go to no man the impoverished relict of a millionaire suffering for her sins—that she would die before Larry should “crow” over her. I gave way. Now you have it. Does it appease you?’

‘To know you sold me to a devil?’ exclaimed Roland.

‘Sold! no, I *gave* you. I gained nothing by the fraud—nothing but sleepless nights. When all was done I suffered remorse, but I could not undo the wrong without implicating her, so had to bear it. My wife’s gentleness tortured me; I hated her for it sometimes, and wished she was a virago; but no, she fears me. My children fear me because it is not in me to be gentle or indulgent. My life has been embittered, and

all through that woman. Had I never looked upon her face I should have been a better man.'

'You would not have reared me in deceit,' moaned Roland, again bowing his head on his hands. 'You would not have been careless of your sweet wife's heart breaking over the death of her firstborn.'

'I did try to make some reparation,' Lockstud said to this, now bending towards the young man, and speaking with a wistful tenderness. 'I bargained that you should be as much under my own roof as possible. I watched you growing with a loving, doting eye, though you may not believe me. I have given you more affection than to all my children put together. My love and pride in you has been a Nemesis, for it is a pain not to be able to tell the world, "This is my son." But now the revenge is complete with this humiliation of confession. You have your revenge.'

These last words were broken, husky, and the speaker turned abruptly to hide face-contortion.

'Revenge!' cried Roland with dramatic force. 'I want no revenge—only the truth, only justice. I have been an unwitting thief under the spell of your Lorelei. Are you

repentant? Prove it. Help me to return to the estate the cost of my education and maintenance for twenty-one years, and then you will have purged your guilt, and we shall stand together as honest men before God and our fellows.'

He raised his head to search his father's face; his eyes were dry now, and full of fire and purpose.

Lockstud, with eyeballs starting and a sickly pallor, stared at him.

'Are you mad? You are not going to cut your own throat and mine? You will remain to the world what you have been, and your mother only shall know you for her son. *She* will not betray me. You have not been a profligate with Jerry Goldwin's money. You have strengthened the kindly feeling for his memory. You say you want no revenge, and what is this madness but the direst revenge?'

'Your repentance is a hollow thing, then.' Roland clasped his hands, and turned his eyes heavenwards. 'My God!' he cried in despair, 'am I to seek and find no righteous shred in my father? Shall fire and brimstone rain down upon his soul? Must I fight this battle alone, unaided?'

'Good heaven!' exclaimed the miserable

Lockstud, white with fear, and beginning to tremble with a new dread. 'What is it you wish me to do?'

'Make restitution. Have you not the means? And to whom should I apply for help if not to you?'

'You apply,' said Lockstud, with increasing despair, 'to a man of straw. *I* want help. I am steeped in debt. How can I help you?'

'*You* in debt!'

Roland said this with a peculiar inflection of voice that expressed doubt of what he heard.

'In debt,' repeated the other with a groan.

'Then,' said Roland, flashing again, 'I will work the harder—work unaided. As Cecil Lockstud I am entitled to £500 with accumulated interest; but as Cecil Lockstud the usurper I am entitled to nothing. Not a penny of it will I touch; it must go back to the estate for part payment. For the rest I will work.'

'You will do this deliberately when you need not?' gasped Lockstud, with livid lips and quivering nostrils, and a hand convulsively clenched. 'When it has gone too far to be altered—when those men, the heirs, are already rich and independent? You will rush into poverty and drag down disgrace upon the

family? Let two women die in a gaol, perhaps—send *me* to perdition?’

‘No, no; how can I do that?’ said Roland, with a fresh rush of tears at the misery and unhappy complication. ‘The whole world need not know it. I have not spent a sleepless night for nothing. You don’t know what I have suffered in thinking it out. For a time I thought as you are tempting me to think now—to let matters rest, to go on as the millionaire, and for the thought I have scourged myself. It must not—cannot be. I know the conditions of the will. The Captain and Mr. Larry are the legal heirs in the event of absence of kin. But it seems they know Jeremiah Goldwin’s antecedents so well that they affirm there is no next-of-kin, and this bears out what you yourself just observed. If there were, surely somebody would have turned up long ago to appeal for crumbs from the rich relative’s table. Most decidedly, Captain Pennacove and Washington Larry are the legal heirs. This is fortunate, for they are my trusty friends. Again, Tackerline has ever professed goodwill for me, and will help me in shielding disgrace from my people. To these three men, then, I will reveal the fraud, but reveal it only on their

word to hide it from the world. Tackerline will conduct the whole matter on the quiet, even to the kin search, if it must be to appease the law. But as *that* will lead to nothing, publicity need not be feared. The business can be wound up in accordance with the will—the world can believe at my desire—and that can wait till the legal claim of Captain Pennacove and Larry shall be fully established, as it must be in the end.'

Lockstud sat bent forward, leaning on the table, and listened, with lowering brow, pallid, parched lips, and features convulsed. Next came a sardonic laugh—a hollow guttural sound—a death rattle from expiring hope, and he muttered :

'And this is not revenge?'

'You know it is not,' returned Roland. 'Justice—only justice and truth; and it must be borne.'

'Your "trusty" friends may sling their stones at me. Paul Pry may trample, and Mrs. Goldwin may starve and rot.'

'Starve and rot,' repeated Roland, with dull anger in his face, 'when she shall be allowed to escape criminal prosecution? She has infinite resources!'—this with bitterness—'and she must have means. She has excellent invest-

ments, which will compensate her for her forfeiture of the annual £100 which would otherwise be her due.'

'My heaven! this is unendurable.' Lockstud rose excitedly, paced the long dining-room twice to and fro, and then reseated himself, to fall wearily back in his chair and groan. 'Investments!' he cried. 'They are moonshine. *I* invested for her—for myself—for Mrs. Dripper, too. They are overboard, I tell you. The Nabob is on the eve of collapse, and she has yet to learn this—she is ruined, and does not stand alone on the wreck.'

'Then,' said Roland solemnly, 'it is her retribution. She must get away; we must raise money somehow and send her away. Here again let the world think the rich Mrs. Goldwin has gone abroad. She must not complain. You must not interpose.'

Lockstud sat all of a heap, limp and wretched. Roland put out a hand, and laid it on his arm.

'Do you suffer alone?' he asked. 'We have both to bear the brunt of the evil—to bear it like men. Trust me to shield you all I can—to dwell on those circumstances that may palliate your offence. Let them see you

are eager to redeem the past sin with present courage. Look up and declare yourself ready to do the right, and I will call you "father" in my heart—forget, if I can, the cruel wrong, and accept your bravery as an atonement. The slinging of the stones shall fall harmless.'

The iron tears were once more driven wildly to Lockstud's eyes; his head went down to be cradled in his arms on the table.

'How shall I tell 'Cilla? for she must be told,' he managed to articulate, for the first time fearing his gentle wife.

'I will spare you that much pain, if you will leave cowardice to knaves and spare me the pain of thinking you will only act on compulsion. I want your free will—your consent to the step I mean to take.' Roland, now excessively agitated, rose and walked a short distance away, saying as he went: 'Oh, think of it—think of it! think of the evil to be undone, the blemish to be wiped away, and then stand clear before heaven! Why fear three men?'

Lockstud looked up, and also rose with a hand stretched out—a magnetic draw for his son—and his face haggard and drawn. Roland, returning, caught at the hand.

‘ You consent ?’ he said.

‘ I consent,’ said Lockstud ; ‘ I surrender.’

So Lockstud, with a grace born of necessity, bowed before his son and bit the dust.

END OF VOL. II.

